NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

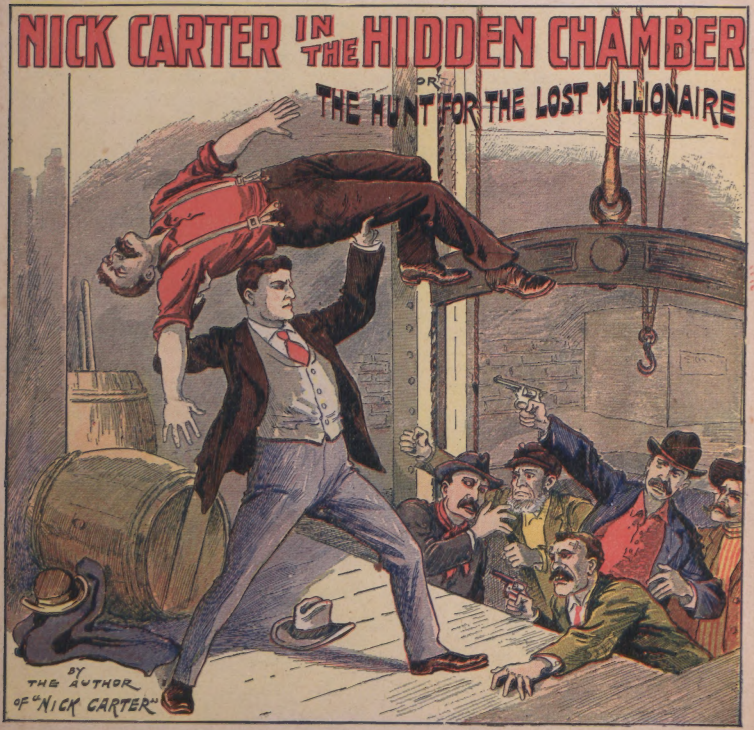
Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered at Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 366. Price, Five Cents.

NICK CARTER IN THE HIDDEN CHAMBER

OR,

THE HUNT FOR THE LOST MILLIONAIRE



At the same time Nick Carter caught hold of the man's left side with his right hand, gave him a jerk to one side, and then, exerting all his strength, lifted the struggling scoundrel over his head, and then let him fall into the open hatch.

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No. 366. NEW YORK, January 2, 1904. Price Five Cents.

NICK CARTER IN THE HIDDEN CHAMBER;

OR,

The Hunt for the Lost Millionaire.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

AN ELOPEMENT OR AN ABDUCTION?

"John Jacob Askwith, the young millionaire, has been missing for several days from his home. His friends have been unable to secure any tidings of his whereabouts, and have notified Inspector McLaughlin; it is feared that he has been kidnaped by a band of conspirators who will hold him for ransom."

This was the announcement that Nick Carter read in an afternoon paper and one which aroused all his detective instinct. He determined to look into it.

Then the great detective left his office.

An hour afterward he was ringing the front doorbell of the Askwith mansion on Fifth Avenue, near Central Park.

The door was opened by a servant in livery, and the detective asked to see the mother of the man who had disappeared.

The Askwith residence was a plain brownstone mansion.

It was rather insignificant when compared with the other palaces of New York's millionaires in the vicinity.

Although the Askwith family was considered to be the richest in the metropolis, the members of it lived very plainly.

They were an exclusive set of people, and did not mingle much with the members of the Four Hundred.

The interior of the Askwith mansion was furnished with rich but not showy furniture.

Everything about the place indicated refinement and culture.

John Jacob was the youngest son, and had gained quite a reputation as the author of several books.

He was a single man and his mother's favorite.

Nick Carter was ushered into the back parlor, after he had given the butler his card, which the man took upstairs.

While waiting for Mrs. Askwith to appear, he amused himself with examining the ancestral portraits on the walls.

These were quite numerous, and the detective became so engrossed with them that he was not aware that any one had entered the room until a voice exclaimed at his elbow:

"You desire to see me, sir?"

Nick Carter turned around and beheld an elderly lady,

dressed in black, standing in the center of the room, by the side of an onyx table.

In an instant he recognized the mother of the great millionaire.

She was a woman of medium build, with a kindly face and snow-white hair, which was done up in Renaissance style.

"My name is Nicholas Carter, and I am a detective," Nick remarked, after he had made a quick inspection of the lady.

Mrs. Askwith's face bore evidence of the grief which she was experiencing.

It was some moments before she was able to control her voice, and then she said:

"You have brought me information about my son?"

"I am sorry to say I have not," Nick replied. "But I have come here to offer you my services, and if it be the will of Providence I will find your son and restore him to you."

"You are a private detective?"

"I am."

"Are you the man whom my son employed two years ago to find some bonds, which were stolen out of the safe in his downtown office?"

"I am."

"I was thinking of sending for you this morning, and I am glad you have called."

"Then you are satisfied for me to go ahead and see what I can do in the way of discovering what has become of your son?"

"I am. And whatever money is necessary to help you to make your investigations I will furnish you with."

"Thank you. Now I desire to ask you a few questions."

"I will tell you all I am able to."

"What time did your son leave home?"

"Ten o'clock Monday morning."

"Did you see him before he left?"

"I did. He kissed me good-by, and said that he was only going down to the office for a couple of hours, and would return before two o'clock, when he was going with me out riding in the park."

"You heard nothing from him after he left?"

"Nothing."

"You did not go to drive?"

"No. I waited until four o'clock. I called up his office several times on the telephone, and his secretary informed me that John had not been at the office. Then I thought that perhaps he had met some friend, and was unavoidably detained on business. The night passed, and then, when he did not return by noon, I informed the police and asked them to look for him. Never before in his life has he failed to tell me where he was going, and if he were forced to remain away from home for a night, he always sent me word."

"Do you know whether your son received any threatening letters of late?"

"I have examined all of his letters, and I have failed to find one, which would, in any way, throw light upon his disappearance."

"Had your son an enemy who would want to do him an injury?"

"Not that I know of."

"Do you know of any lady to whom he was paying attention?"

"Well—eh?"

"Don't be afraid to tell me."

"For several months he has been courting Miss Evelyn van Schaick."

"You mean the society beauty?"

"I do."

"Did she encourage his suit?"

"I believe so."

"Has she called on you?"

"Not since John's disappearance."

"Is she in the city?"

"She was on Sunday."

"Is this all you can tell me?"

"It is."

Nick arose from his seat and he was about to leave the room when the door was thrown open and the butler announced:

"Mr. Reginald van Schaick."

A stout old gentleman, with a very red face, which was caused from high living and enjoying the good things of life, entered the room, puffing and blowing and greatly excited.

"Mrs. Askwith," he puffed, "have you seen my daughter? She has been missing from home since Monday at two o'clock, when she went out to drive with your son."

"Went out to drive with my son?"

This was all that Mrs. Askwith could say as she heard the question propounded by the father of the lady to whom her son had been paying suit, and she sank down in her chair, gazing at the excited old gentleman with astonishment.

Nick Carter looked at Mr. Van Schaick with interest.

The man was worth several millions, and for a number of years he had been retired from the leather business in which he had been engaged in the Swamp for more than half a century.

He was an excellent type of the old Dutch stock, and he had all the excitable peculiarities of the Knickerbockers, the blood of which ran in his veins.

Nick Carter had seen Mr. Van Schaick a number of times, but he had no personal acquaintance with him.

The old gentleman had not noticed the detective, all of his attention being taken up with the mother of the man who had disappeared.

When Nick heard Mr. Van Schaick's question he started.

A thought flashed through his mind that perhaps the disappearance of John Jacob Askwith was not such a mystery, after all, and that instead of the man having met with an accident or been kidnaped, he had simply eloped with Evelyn van Schaick.

But what could have induced the young couple to do such a thing, except it was the opposition of the father, and Nick could not see how old Van Schaick could be opposed to John Jacob Askwith, who was one of the most eligible young men in the city.

Mrs. Askwith was very pale.

She was a woman who had a great regard for the proprieties.

She told herself that it was impossible, and yet here was Mr. Van Schaick, who asserted that his daughter had gone out at two o'clock on Monday afternoon to drive with her son, and since that time no word had been received from either of them.

Nick sympathized with the old lady. He realized fully what her feelings must be.

Thinking to relieve her somewhat of the embarrassment, he turned to the excited old gentleman and said:

"Mr. Van Schaick, you say that your daughter went out with Mr. Askwith on Monday afternoon to take a drive; what proof have you that such a thing is true?"

"Proof!" Mr. Van Schaick ejaculated, as he turned and saw Nick for the first time. "Proof! Who are you, sir?"

"I am a detective," Nick replied, quietly. "My name is Nicholas Carter, and Mrs. Askwith has employed me to discover what has become of her son, who has been missing since Monday morning."

"It's easy enough to see what has become of him. He has tricked my daughter, sir, into a misalliance."

"Mr. Van Schaick," Mrs. Askwith ejaculated, "my son John would never do such a thing."

"Never do such a thing, eh?" Mr. Van Schaick exclaimed. "Madam, he has done it. He has done it, I say."

"Mr. Van Schaick, please calm yourself," Nick interrupted. "Sit down, sir, and let us quietly discuss this matter."

"Discuss it? I want to know where my daughter is."

"And Mrs. Askwith is just as anxious to know where her son is. Now, please do be quiet for a few moments, answer my questions, and then we may be able to arrive at some conclusion in regard to what we had better do."

Mr. Van Schaick sat down in a large easy-chair, and, while he wiped the perspiration from his florid brow, he gazed at the detective.

Mrs. Askwith made a move to say something, but Nick motioned her to be quiet, and she said nothing.

The detective turned to Mr. Van Schaick and asked:

"What time did your daughter leave home?"

"Two o'clock Monday afternoon, I told you," Mr. Van Schaick snapped out.

"You saw her leave?"

"No, sir. I was out of town at the time, and I did not return home until half an hour ago."

"So. Then some one informed you of her absence?"

"My housekeeper did."

"What did your housekeeper tell you?"

"At one o'clock Monday Evelyn received a note from John Askwith, in which he requested her to be ready to take a drive with him at two o'clock. At the appointed hour a carriage drove up to the door, my daughter went out, got into it, and it drove off."

"Did your housekeeper see Mr. Askwith in the carriage?"

"She did not."

"Did your daughter leave any note for you?"

"Not a line."

"And this is all you know?"

"It is, sir; is it not sufficient to lead any one to believe that she and Askwith have gone off together?"

"No."

"What?"

"Listen to me for a moment." Mr. Van Schaick, when John Askwith left his home Monday morning, he informed his mother that he was going to his office, and then he agreed to come home by two o'clock and go with her for a drive in the park. Since he bade her good-by, Mrs. Askwith had not seen or heard of her son. He did not go near his office."

"Is that so?"

"It is."

"Ahem!"

"Did you see the note which your daughter received, and which you claim was written by Askwith?"

"Here it is, sir."

"Where did you find it?"

"On Evelyn's dressing-case in her room."

Nick Carter took the note which Mr. Van Schaick handed to him.

It was badly crumpled.

The detective smoothed it out, glanced at it, and said:

"You are familiar with John Askwith's handwriting?"

"No, I am not," Mr. Van Schaick blurted out.

"Well, I am, and I assure you, Mr. Van Schaick, that this note was never written by John Askwith. It is a fair imitation of his handwriting, but the signature is no more

like his than my signature is like it. Look at it, Mrs. Askwith, and tell me what you think."

Mrs. Askwith looked at the note which the detective passed to her.

"It is a forgery," the old lady exclaimed, and she cast a frightened glance at Nick.

"A forgery, madam?" old Mr. Van Schaick ejaculated. "Is this some scheme to try and pull the wool over my eyes?"

"Not at all, Mr. Van Schaick," Nick hastily replied, at the same time motioning to Mrs. Askwith to let him deal with the old gentleman. "I am familiar with John Askwith's handwriting, and I assure you, on my word of honor, that he never wrote a line of this note. I don't ask you to believe me, but you can take this to any of Askwith's friends and request them to pass judgment on it. Did your daughter receive many notes from Askwith?"

"I think that this was about the only one. Still I'm not certain."

"Were you opposed to Askwith visiting your daughter?"

"Not at all, sir; the fact is, I was highly pleased to think that he and the girl were getting along so nicely together, and if he had come to me and asked me for her, I'd have told him that I'd gladly see her become Mrs. Askwith. What riles me is to think they'd go off in such a sneaking way."

"Do you want to know what I think?"

"Yes."

"Your daughter did not go off with John Askwith."

"Then whom did she go off with?"

"That I can't say. But I propose to find out. It is my belief that the persons who had a hand in Askwith's disappearance also are mixed up in the disappearance of your daughter."

"Then you think——"

"I believe both your daughter and her lover have been abducted."

"By whom?"

"I can't tell, but I intend to find out."

"What could be the motive?"

"To get money out of you and Mrs. Askwith."

"Bosh!"

"Well! You asked me for my opinion and I've given it to you. Now, Mr. Van Schaick, I have a request to make of you."

"What is it?"

"Promise me not to make public your daughter's disappearance for several days."

"I'll do that."

"Thank you. Now I must go. Mrs. Askwith, you and Mr. Van Schaick will hear from me soon."

CHAPTER II.

JACK VINT.

The detective took the note with him when he left the Askwith mansion.

He felt confident that it was a forgery.

It was a formal note and was a mere request for Miss Van Schaick to take a drive.

It was written upon the notehead of the Holland House.

This of itself was sufficient to throw suspicion upon the genuineness of the note.

It was not probable, Nick argued, that such a man as John Askwith would write a note to a young lady in society requesting her to take a drive with him, upon any but his own notepaper.

If Miss Van Schaick had stopped to think for a moment when she received the note, she would have considered it rather strange that her lover should use the notepaper of the Holland House to write to her on.

Nick was puzzled. He was firm in his belief that both Askwith and Miss Van Schaick had been kidnaped, and yet he possessed nothing to back up this belief.

The detective walked down the avenue with bowed head.

All he possessed was the note.

He paused on the corner near the Holland House and began to study the handwriting. The letters were peculiarly formed.

Nick had made a study of chirography.

Although the writer had made an effort to imitate Askwith's handwriting, still he had been unable to hide his own characteristics in the formation of some of the letters. The s's and j's were not those of John Askwith.

Nick folded up the note.

He then turned around and entered the Holland House, going up to the office desk upon which the register was placed.

He proceeded to examine the names on the pages of the book.

He turned to the Monday's pages. They contained about one hundred names.

Nick finished the examination of the first page and turned his eyes upon the second.

Running his forefinger down over the names he uttered an exclamation as he came to a name in the center of the page, and on it his finger rested.

He examined this name intently.

From his pocket he took the Askwith note and glanced from it to the name on the page.

The j's and s's of the name on the page were the same as those letters in the note.

Nick placed the note in his pocket.

He glanced around and saw that no one was near except the clerk, to whom he called.

When the clerk came up to the desk, the detective asked:

"Is Mr. James Scannell, of Elmira, still stop here?"

That was the name on the register.

"Mr. Scannell left the hotel on Monday night," the clerk replied.

"Are you acquainted with the gentleman?" Nick asked.

"I never saw him before until he came here on Monday."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"I do not."

"Can you give me a description of him?"

"He is about fifty years of age, of fine physique, very dark, with large eyes, a smooth face, bald head, and a nervous twitch about the mouth. There is a scar on the left side of his upper lip. One of the fingers of his right hand is missing."

"Which finger is it?"

"The third."

"How was he dressed?"

"He wore a diagonal suit—Prince Albert coat of the latest cut, a high hat, and on the little finger of his left hand was a diamond ring. He had considerable money."

"How did he impress you?"

"Well—ah—to tell you the truth, I did not fancy him. I took him to be a sport."

"Did he have any visitors?"

"Two men called on him shortly after he arrived."

"What time was that?"

"About nine o'clock."

"Can you describe these men?"

"Not very well. But both were rather rough-looking persons."

"Did you hear their names?"

"I did not."

"Thank you for your information."

"Mr. Carter, what——"

"I can't answer any questions."

"Mum's the word, then?"

"It is."

Nick Carter walked out of the hotel.

His face wore a serious expression.

The description of James Scannell answered the description of a man whom Nick knew.

That man was a notorious rascal.

Nick had him sent to State's prison for forgery.

As far as the detective could recollect, that man's term had not yet expired.

That was the reason he was so thoughtful and puzzled. But he decided to make sure whether this man was at large or still in State's prison. When this question was settled he would know how to act.

Nick went to the nearest long-distance telephone office and called up the warden's office at the Sing Sing Prison.

"Is Jack Vint still a prisoner in your institution?" the detective asked as soon as his call on the telephone was answered.

"He is not," the warden replied over the 'phone.

"When was he released?"

"Two months ago. He was pardoned out."

That was sufficient.

Nick hurried from the telephone office.

He was all alive with energy now.

He was like a war horse ready to bound into the thickest part of a battle.

"Now to find Vint," he ejaculated. "I may be wrong in my supposition that he is the man, but it will do no harm to find him and track him for a short time."

Nick Carter hurried away downtown.

It had become dark since he had left the Askwith mansion.

He had not proceeded far before he remembered that he was not disguised.

It would never do for him to start on the trail of Jack Vint without a disguise.

The man was a desperate character and associated with men of a like ilk.

To get upon his trail the detective would be forced to visit some of the worst localities in the city.

A costumer's shop was near at hand, and Nick went into it.

Ten minutes afterward he came out dressed like a Bowery tough.

He boarded a Third Avenue surface car.

When the detective came out of the costumer's a tall man who was standing on the corner watching the place began to follow him.

He got on the rear platform of the car while Nick got onto the front.

If Nick had not been so busy thinking, and had looked around him after leaving the Holland House he would have soon discovered that he was being followed by this man.

Not finding any one inside the hotel watching him, he did not think it was possible that any one would track him just yet, for it was not known that he had taken up the investigation of John Askwith's mysterious disappearance.

At Grand Street Nick alighted from the car.

The man did the same.

The detective walked down the street, and turned into Eldridge Street.

Below Grand Street, halfway down the block, was a saloon.

It was kept by an Irishman named Larry Bryan.

The place was a resort for shady characters.

Up to the present time the police had never been able to connect Bryan with any crime, notwithstanding the fact that most of his customers were criminals.

Back of the saloon was a summer garden.

When Nick Carter entered the resort a man was playing on a piano, and the summer garden was filled with men and women.

The tall man who was following the detective walked into the place close after him.

Nick looked around the place and a smile lighted up his face.

He walked back to the end of the garden and took a seat at an empty table.

It was near a table at which two men and two women were seated. They were drinking iced champagne.

One of these men was Jack Vint, the man whom Nick Carter was in search of.

As soon as he was seated the detective ordered a lemonade and a cigar. Then he turned his attention to Vint and his companions.

Nick did not notice that the waiter to whom he had given his order was stopped by the tall man at the entrance to the garden.

The man said something to the waiter, passed him some money, and then went and took a seat at one of the tables.

The waiter returned to Nick's table and placed the lemonade and cigar in front of him.

Nick drank the lemonade and lighted the cigar.

Five minutes afterward a strange feeling began to creep over him.

He tried to get up, but could not.

His senses were leaving him, and the detective realized that he had been drugged.

CHAPTER III.

TRAPPED.

Nick threw himself forward upon the table.

He tried to stick his finger down his throat so that he could force himself to vomit, and in this way throw off some of the drug which he had taken.

It was too late. His eyes closed, and he sunk into unconsciousness.

A pair of sharp eyes watched the detective's struggles.

They belonged to the man who had followed him and who had spoken to the waiter.

The instant the detective became unconscious, the man arose to his feet.

No one had noticed Nick except this man.

The man passed hurriedly down the aisle between the tables until he reached the table at which the two men and women were seated.

He recognized the man and exclaimed:

"Ben Everts, what brings you here?"

"Not so loud, Vint," the man ejaculated, in an undertone.

"What's the matter?" Vint inquired, and he cast an anxious glance around the room, for he saw from the expression of Everts' face that something serious was the matter. "Bring a chair up and sit down."

"No; there is work for us to do."

"What is it?"

"Do you see that man at the table behind you?"

Vint looked around.

"You mean that fellow with a jag on, asleep?" he inquired, as he saw Nick.

"I do," Everts answered.

"Do you know him?"

"I do."

"Who is he?"

"Nick Carter."

"What?"

Vint turned pale and his hands shook.

His companions started. They were frightened.

Everts was the only one who was calm.

His dark, saturnine face shone with bitter hatred for the detective.

"Listen!" he hissed. "We must get him out of here. Let the women go out, and then you, Dart Darrell, and I will drag him out the back way without attracting attention."

"Did you fix him?" Vint nervously inquired.

"I did."

"How did you get onto him?"

"I'll explain all to you as soon as we get him out."

The women arose from the table.

"Lize," Vint said, addressing one of them, "you and Sal had better go over to the rooms. We'll meet you there."

"All right," Lize rejoined, and then she and Sal left the garden.

Ben Everts was a notorious greengoods man.

He was a son of a minister, and after leaving college he came to New York, and after drifting about town until his money was all gone, he became a member of the Barney Maguire gang of greengoods swindlers, whose rendezvous was in the Tenderloin precinct.

He had spent a time in prison, and after his release he started a gang of his own.

Nick Carter had been after Everts for some months, but had not succeeded in entrapping him.

No wonder Everts hated him!

As soon as the women had gone, Everts said:

"Vint, you walk over behind that large palm and see if

the gate is locked. If it is unlocked, you shake your hand, and then Dart and I will yank him out."

Vint walked over to the gate.

It was unlocked, and he waved his hand.

"Now, Dart, let us be quick," Everts whispered, and at the same time he arose and, stepping over to the next table, he and Dart Darrell each took hold of one of the detective's arms.

The attention of the crowd was drawn toward a woman who was singing.

"This is our chance," Everts said.

He and his companions dragged Nick Carter toward the gate.

No one paid any attention to them; they reached the gate and then carried the detective into the next yard.

Vint closed the gate.

"Curse him!" Everts ejaculated.

"What'll we do with him?" Vint asked.

"Kill him!" Darrell hissed.

"Not here," Everts admonished, as he saw Darrell make a move to draw his knife.

"Where then?"

"We will bind and gag him. Then we will take him up to the Eagle's Nest."

"You'll need a carriage to do that?"

"Prince is on his stand out on Grand Street."

"I'll go and get him," Vint exclaimed.

"Do so."

Vint hurried off, and in less than five minutes he returned with the statement that he had secured the carriage.

They carried Nick Carter out through an alley which ran between the houses, and then, after they placed him in the carriage, they got in themselves and ordered the man to drive to the Eagle's Nest.

As soon as the carriage started, Everts said:

"I was standing outside the Holland House when I saw Carter come out. I followed him, and I was surprised to see him enter Bryan's joint. Then, when I saw him take a seat near you, I immediately suspected that in some way he may have got onto our plans and had decided to track us."

"Then your meeting with him was only by chance?" Vint said.

"That was all, but a lucky chance it was, too, for it enabled me to give the waiter a tip to put knockout drops into his lemonade."

"Do you really believe he is onto our schemes?"

"I'm not certain; and yet, what could he have been doing at the Holland House?"

"That is hard to tell."

"He's disguised."

"Yes; I see that."

The men were silent for a time, and the carriage rattled on uptown.

It turned down Fourteenth Street, and at Avenue A it turned into a stable.

The door was closed as soon as the carriage got inside the stable.

Outside of this place was a sign upon which was painted the words:

"Eagle's Nest Stables."

Only one man was around. He was a rough-looking character.

After he closed the doors he came up to the carriage and looked inside.

"How's the lay?" Everts asked.

"No one is around," the fellow replied.

"Good!"

"What have you? Another——"

"Hush!"

"Very well."

"Is the trap working?"

"It is."

"Come, let us get out."

This was addressed to his companions.

The three men got out of the carriage.

Then they lifted the detective, and carried him over to a distant corner, where they placed him on what appeared to be a trapdoor.

"Do you need me any longer?" Prince, the driver, asked.

"No," Everts replied; "you can go as soon as Manning lets us down. Now, Manning."

They all stood upon the trap.

Manning walked into the office, and pulled a string hanging from the ceiling over a desk.

Immediately the men and the detective commenced to descend.

No noise was made. They were on a sort of an elevator. Slowly they went down.

When the elevator had been let down some twenty feet, it stopped.

Vint struck a match.

From a shelf at the side he took a lantern and lighted it.

A long passage was disclosed.

"Lift him up," Everts said. "Vint, you lead the way."

Then Dart Darrell and Everts, following Vint, carried Nick Carter along the passage.

The walls of this passage were of solid masonry.

After walking about a hundred feet, Vint stopped in front of an iron door.

Three knocks he gave on it. A silence followed. Then one knock was given on the inside of the door. Vint answered with two knocks. A small hole was opened. An eye appeared at it.

"Open the portals, Elmora," Everts exclaimed.

Bolts were shot back. This took nearly five minutes. These people had everything secured well. That iron door seemed as impregnable as a fortress. Soon the door opened, and a flood of light was thrown into the passage.

A radiant creature confronted the men.

A girl, not more than nineteen, with a wasp-like figure, jet black hair, the eyes of a raven, coral lips, a low, broad forehead, a complexion as rich as that of a peach, such was Elmora.

In her ears she wore a pair of large, sparkling diamonds of the purest water.

Her form was enveloped in rich blue satin drapery, and her dainty feet were incased in golden slippers.

When she spoke, it was in a rich contralto voice.

One could readily see that she had creole blood in her veins.

"What have you here?" she asked, as she beheld the detective.

"Bolt the doors," Everts exclaimed.

This Elmora did, and returning to the spot where they were standing, she repeated her question.

"Nick Carter, the ferret," Vint answered.

"Nick Carter!" Elmora, at the mention of the detective's name, was transformed from a gentle lamb into a prancing, vicious tigress. "Nick Carter," she hissed, as she put her hand beneath the folds of her gown and drew forth a jeweled stiletto.

She sprang toward the detective with her stiletto raised ready to bury it hilt-deep in Nick's heart.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHAMBER OF TORTURE.

"Hold, Elmora!"

Everts caught hold of the wrist of the infuriated girl, and, pressing her back, he prevented her from carrying out her design of burying the dagger in the detective's heart.

Why the rascal should have prevented Elmora from killing Nick is a mystery.

He hated the man as much as she did, and while in the dive on Eldridge Street he had declared that the detective must die.

It is marvelous at times how the evil designs of men are prevented.

It seemed as if an overruling Providence watched over and protected Nick Carter at that moment, and used Everts as an instrument to saving the detective's life.

"Why do you do this?" Elmora screamed, as with flashing eyes, her bosom heaving with emotion, she stood back with hand still upraised, and glared at the man who had thwarted her.

"Calm yourself, Elmora," Everts quietly replied, and at the same time he fastened his eyes on the girl.

Her eyes met his. She started, and an immediate change came over her. For a moment she stood like one transfixed. Then she gave a gasp and her hand fell to her side. A grayish pallor came over her face. A dull expression came into her eyes.

"Go, take a seat," Everts ordered, in a stern voice.

With a listless air Elmora moved toward a divan in the corner of the room, and threw herself upon it.

"You are a wizard, Everts," Jack Vint ejaculated, as he watched this performance. "You are the only one who can control her. I'd give a fortune if I possessed your powers."

"No doubt you would," Everts replied. "I did not know that I possessed such hypnotic powers until I met Zanora, the astrologer, six months ago, and then she showed me how to develop them. I practiced first on Elmora, and you see the success that I have met with. I wish that I had known years ago that I possessed such power; you may bet your life I would be a rich man by this time."

"What made Elmora hate Nick Carter so?"

"She had a lover once named Proud; he murdered a woman while committing a robbery, and Nick Carter ran him down. You remember the case?"

"I do."

"Proud was executed, and Elmora swore she would avenge his death by killing the detective."

"What do you know of her history?"

"Her father and mother were creoles; they came to New York when she was an infant. They died and left Elmora to the care of Zanora, the sorceress, who educated her and brought her up. She fell in love with Proud, and it was then I first met her. After Proud's death she became attached to me, and she has been with me ever since; she has been useful to me in more ways than one. As she possesses wonderful clairvoyant powers, I have been able to put her under the influence at all times and learn what my friends and enemies are doing."

"She's calm enough now."

"She will remain so until I release her from the influence of my will."

Everts walked to the side of a room, where a lamp was burning.

He lighted a cigar.

"What are we to do with Nick Carter?" Vint inquired, after a momentary silence.

It was easy to see that Everts was the master spirit of the crowd, and that his companions looked to him for advice.

"I've been considering that matter seriously," Everts replied, as he seated himself in a chair, crossed his legs,

lolled back at his ease, blew a cloud of smoke above his head and looked toward Vint. "At first I thought that it would be our best plan to exterminate Nick Carter on the spot as soon as we reached here. But after thinking the matter over, I've come to the conclusion that it will be advantageous for us to keep him until he recovers, and then endeavor to try and find out from him what he knows about our plans."

"He will never tell us."

"We will torture him until he does tell us."

"How long will the effects of this drug last?"

"An hour yet."

"What shall we do?"

"Remove him to the inner chamber. Place him on the platform. Then come back here and we will wait until the others arrive."

"Is there to be a meeting to-night?"

"I've called an assembly for twelve o'clock."

"Come, Darrell, and help me carry Nick into the next hall."

Vint and Darrell lifted up the detective.

Everts pressed a button in the wall behind the chair in which he was seated, and a part of what seemed to be solid masonry began to open.

It was a concealed door. An entrance was disclosed.

Vint and Darrell carried the detective into the next apartment.

It was a large room. At one end was a platform. Over it were two large chairs over which hung a blue canopy. A table, the top of which was shaped in the form of a skull, was placed in front of the chairs. This table was made of an ashen-gray material. From the eyes of the skull two red lights shone.

The walls of the room were draped with black cloth.

The ceiling was black. Upon it here and there in white were painted the signs of the Zodiac.

At the end of the room opposite the platform was a large iron chair. On the sides were iron arms with steel hands, the fingers of which were as sharp as sword points. This chair was the instrument of torture. In it a victim was placed.

By working a screw at the back of the chair the arms would come down and the steel fingers would clasp the head of the unfortunate person who was seated in the chair, and would be pressed into the skull.

The torture was horrible.

The chair had been patterned after an instrument of torture which had been used during the days of the Inquisition.

The floor of the room was of cement.

In the center of the chamber was a square of masonry. It was hollow in the middle. In this part a fire burned. It was intensely hot and the coals were red. The fumes and gases from the burning coals were carried off through a pipe and ventilator in the ceiling.

At the four corners of this furnace, red, green, yellow and blue lights burned from the tops of skulls, which were mounted on poles. In the center of each space between the skulls were four ghastly skeletons, which bent over the furnace. In the right hand of each was fastened a jeweled dagger, the point of which rested on the fourth rib over the heart.

From the center of the ceiling over the furnace was suspended a tackle and sling.

Vint and Darrell placed Nick Carter upon the platform, and then returned to the room where Everts was.

One can easily imagine what the effect would be upon the mind of one who awakened from a stupor or sound sleep and found oneself in such a ghostly chamber as this inner room was.

"What time is it?" Vint inquired, as soon as he and Darrell had returned to the room.

"A quarter to twelve," Everts answered.

"Are you going to keep Elmora in that condition?"

"I am, until the meeting commences, and then I will bring her out."

Everts had closed the door which opened into the secret chamber.

A silence fell upon the group.

Suddenly the silence was broken by three loud raps, which sounded on the outer door.

Everts and his companions sprang to their feet.

"Hush!" Everts whispered, as he stepped toward the door.

Everts gave one knock upon the door.

Two knocks were given in reply from the outside.

He waited a moment, and then pushed back the slide over the peephole and looked out.

One glance satisfied him that all was right, and he opened the door.

Ten men entered the room. All wore masks. These were red, white and blue in color.

As each passed Everts, he grasped the leader's hand and gave him a peculiar grasp.

After the men had entered the room, Everts closed and locked the door.

Then he made a sign to Vint and Darrell, who put on long blue-and-white robes, and covered their heads and faces with cowls, in which were cut eye holes, through which they could see.

Everts put on a golden-colored robe, and a mask of the same material.

He walked over to the couch and touched Elmora.

She arose in a dreamlike manner.

"Put on the robe!" Everts commanded.

Elmora proceeded to a wardrobe, which she opened and took out a silver-colored gown, which she put on.

Over her head and face she threw a white veil.

From a shelf Everts took down thirteen torches.

These he handed to each one present and ordered them to light them, which was done.

Taking Elmora by the arm, he placed her and himself at the head of the men, and then opened the door leading into the inner chamber.

"Elmora, start the chant," he ordered.

In a clear, contralto voice the girl began to chant a weird strain.

Everts pressed another button in the wall, and then the chamber was filled with mournful music, which came from an automatic organ, which was concealed under the platform.

The ghostly procession began to move into the chamber.

At that moment Nick Carter opened his eyes and struggled into a sitting position.

CHAPTER V.

MOSES, THE JEW.

After leaving Mrs. Askwith, Mr. Van Schaick went to his home, and as soon as he entered it, he went direct to his library.

He had hardly been seated at his desk ten minutes when the butler entered and handed him a card.

The old gentleman adjusted his eyeglasses upon his nose, glanced at the card and read aloud:

"Moses Slavinski. I don't know any one by that name," he ejaculated, looking up at the butler.

"He is a Jew, sir," the butler said. "And he said that he desired to see you upon very pressing business."

"I don't know the man. Tell him I can't see him."

"I told him that, sir, but he insisted upon seeing you."

"Tell him to call again."

"Put, zir, I tezire to zee you on pressing peezness."

Mr. Van Schaick started from his chair as he heard these words, and he looked toward the doorway, in which a little shriveled-up old Jew, with a sharp and very shrewd face, was standing.

The Jew's hair was long and unkempt. It was gray. An iron-gray beard covered his face.

He appeared to be about sixty years of age.

There was a villainous twinkle in his small, foxy eyes.

His hands were thin, and his fingers, with their dirty, sharp, untrimmed nails, were like talons.

He had a soft, insinuating way about him, which was unpleasant to behold.

Mr. Van Schaick looked at the man in astonishment, and so great was his surprise at the fellow's insolence in having pushed his way into the library so unceremoniously, that he was unable to speak for several moments.

Moses Slavinski eyed the old gentleman steadily, and slid farther into the room, until he stood within a few feet of the owner of the house.

"What do you mean, sir, by this intrusion?" Mr. Van Schaick thundered, when he regained his voice.

"Easy, gentlemans, easy," the Jew rejoined, as he smirked and bowed. "I vant ter speak mit you in brivate—to peezness——"

"Confound your business!" the old gentleman stormed, losing his temper.

Moses remained perfectly calm.

"Meester Van Schaick, you vos exciting youseff too mooch," Moses remarked. "Ef you vould vonce send t'e putler hout I vould be aple——"

"Hang you! get out of here!"

"Easy, gentlemans——"

"William, put the rascal out!"

William made a move to obey his master's orders.

Moses straightened himself up.

His face darkened.

His little eyes seemed to shoot forth sparks.

"Don't you douch me. Mine pody vas zakred. Ef you douch me vonce I vill zue you for tamages. Meester Van Schaick, I gomes here ter dells you somedings apout your taughter, and you vos so grazy like dot you von't listen——"

"Something about my daughter!" Mr. Van Schaick gasped, and he instantly became pale and calm.

The Jew smiled.

He put on a knowing look and nodded his head several times.

Looking from the master to the butler, he said:

"I vos te bossessor of von zegret vich——"

Here he paused and gave another glance at Mr. Van Schaick, and then looked at the butler with an air which seemed to say to the father:

"Do you want me to talk before your servant?"

Mr. Van Schaick understood the look.

"William, you can go. I'll see what this man has to say. Remain in the hall within call."

William bowed and left the room.

As soon as the door of the library was closed, Mr. Van Schaick said:

"Now, sir, tell me the object of your call."

"Be zeaded, gentlemans," Moses rejoined, as he squatted himself in a chair near the desk.

Mr. Van Schaick bit his lip with annoyance.

He had never had any one assume such an air of insolence toward him before, but he restrained himself and seated himself in his chair.

"Now, sir!" the old gentleman ejaculated, when he had resumed his seat.

"Dot vos richt," the Jew exclaimed, as he rubbed his hands together and smiled.

"Come, now, I have no time to waste with superfluous words."

"Zertainly not."

"Tell me your business."

"Your taughter vos missing?"

"Who told you that?"

"Vait joost vun moment."

"Go on."

"You vant invormation?"

"I do."

"I have id."

"You have?"

"Ya."

Moses nodded his head.

He bent forward and peered at Mr. Van Schaick.

Every change of the old merchant's countenance was marked by him.

Moses made no move to volunteer to tell what the information was which he possessed.

Mr. Van Schaick looked at him for several moments and waited, expecting the Jew to explain.

He did not know Moses.

If he had been acquainted with the old leech he would have known that Moses Slavinski never gave any one any information unless he was well paid for his trouble.

Finding that Moses made no attempt to speak, Mr. Van Schaick said:

"What is the information which you claim that you have."

"You expect me ter dell you?" Moses ejaculated, raising his hands in surprise.

"Certainly."

"Vell, Meester Van Schaick, I vas 'ad zum drouples vonce ter get dot invormation, und et vas vorth monish."

"Oh, I see. You want money?"

"Zerdainly."

"How much?"

"Vun dousand thaler."

"Absurd!"

"You vill not bay?"

"Not one cent."

"Den you vill learn noddings."

Moses arose from his chair.

Mr. Van Schaick hesitated.

After he had become calm he was able to study the Jew, and he saw that he was a rascal.

Mr. Van Schaick had been deemed a shrewd business man in his day, and he was a hard man to drive a bargain with.

Now he looked upon this Jew as a blackmailer.

Suddenly, while he hesitated about what he ought to do, he remembered what Nick Carter had told him.

Instantly he decided to put Moses off, and to send for Nick Carter and consult him, so he said:

"Mister Slavinski, I cannot tell you now what I will be willing to do. I want time to think over your proposition. If you call here to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock, I'll give you an answer."

"Meester Van Schaick, I vos ondo dose tricks. I gives you varnings dot ef you galls in der bolice, I vill know noddings. I vill gall ter-morrow," Moses replied, and then departed.

As soon as Slavinski was out of the house, Mr. Van Schaick ordered his butler to follow the Jew and find out where he went, and then, after the butler was gone, he wrote a letter to Nick Carter, asking him to call.

CHAPTER VI.

A LUCKY OPPORTUNITY.

When Nick Carter beheld the strange procession of masked men moving into the room, and heard the music under him, he thought at first that he was asleep.

But he soon realized that he was awake.

He felt the cords, with which his arms were bound, pressing into his flesh, and he saw that he was gagged.

Then he remembered all that had occurred up to the time he began to lose consciousness in the saloon on Eldridge Street.

Where he was he knew not. But he did not know that he was in the power of a band of scoundrels.

His eyes caught sight of the instrument of torture at the end of the room, and he beheld the tackle over the furnace, and it did not need any explanation to tell him what those things were for. They could be only used for one purpose, and that was to torture victims who were unfortunate enough to fall into the hands of these men.

Nick looked around the room, examining everything closely.

He could see no avenue of escape.

With great interest he watched the procession. In vain he tried to conjecture who the men were.

Over and over again he asked himself whether any of them were Jack Vint and his companion who were with the women in the saloon. Nick thought that he would be able to recognize Vint's voice if he should hear it.

How his identity came to be discovered, he could not understand.

As he thought of this, he came to the conclusion that some one must have tracked him from the Holland House. And yet he could not see how this could have happened. But here was a fact—he was a prisoner. Therefore, some one must have tracked him to the saloon, have put the

knockout drops into the lemonade, and then brought him to this den a prisoner.

While he was thinking about these matters the procession moved around the furnace three times, and then Everts and Elmora ascended the platform, seating themselves in the chairs, while the men stood, five on each side of the fire and one at the end.

All raised their torches over their heads and turned their eyes toward their leader.

Everts raised his hand.

The music ceased.

"Brothers!" Everts exclaimed, in a loud voice, which the detective failed to recognize, "we have met to wreak vengeance upon the detective spy, Nick Carter. What say you shall be done to him?"

"Let him die!" the men chorused.

"So be it."

"Death to Nick Carter, the spy!"

"So be it."

"Let him be tortured!"

"So be it."

"Death to Nick Carter, the spy!"

"Take him to the center."

Nick heard these words.

They were enough to strike the bravest heart with terror.

Although a chill crept over him, the detective displayed no sign of fear. Bravely he looked his captors in the face. No matter what they might do to him, he decided that he would show them that they could not make him play the part of a coward.

"We intend to kill you, Nick Carter," Everts exclaimed, as he leaned forward upon the desk and glanced down at the detective.

"So I heard you say before," Nick rejoined.

"You think that we will not do it."

"I believe that you will do it, unless you are frustrated in your design."

"That is not probable."

"Stranger things than that have happened."

"Kill him—roast him alive."

It was Elmora who hissed this.

She had stepped up to Everts' side.

Nick Carter started when he heard the girl's voice.

He thought that it was familiar, and he tried to recall where he had heard it before.

Everts caught hold of Elmora's arm.

"Go take your seat," he ordered.

"I will not." Elmora exclaimed, and she dragged her arm away from the chief.

"Take your seat."

"I will not."

Elmora stood with form erect. She was facing Everts. She had recovered from the spell which he had placed upon her, and her form shook with indignation.

Everts tried to get her under control again, but he failed. He could not get her eyes to meet his. With an oath he caught hold of her arm.

"Let me go," Elmora cried, and she struggled to free herself."

"Will you be quiet?" Everts hissed.

He pressed the girl back toward her chair.

She was growing infuriated. She caught hold of his mask and tore it from his face. Her own fell off, also. Both of their faces were uncovered.

Nick Carter recognized them now. He knew Everts, and was familiar with his record. Elmora he was also acquainted with.

Elmora and Everts struggled on.

The attention of the gang was centered on them.

Nick Carter noticed this, and glanced around him.

The two men who had pulled him from the platform had moved from his side. He was standing alone.

Quickly he began to try and work his arms out of the cords which had bound them. After a few moments the cords began to loosen.

Nick did not stir. Cautiously he glanced at the men.

The struggle between Elmora and Everts was still going on.

The men were paying no attention to the detective.

The cords became looser. Nick was able to work one wrist free. He pressed his arms close together and the cords slipped down and fell to the floor.

The detective's arms were free. Still he did not move. Now he glanced around.

He saw that the men had taken no note of what he had succeeded in doing.

Now was his opportunity.

Everts had succeeded in fastening his eyes upon Elmora's. Gradually the girl's struggles were growing less. In a few moments the rascal would have her under control.

Nick felt in his pockets. His knife and pistols, as well as his dark-lantern, he discovered, had not been taken away from him.

The rascals had been so engrossed with other things that they had forgotten to search the detective.

Nick took out his knife and cut the rope with which his ankles were tied. Then he removed the gag from his mouth.

As quick as a flash of lightning he whipped out his revolvers.

Just then Elmora sank back in the chair helpless.

Everts turned around and he looked at Nick Carter.

A cry of alarm escaped his lips.

He saw what the detective had accomplished.

With an oath he made a spring from the platform toward Nick.

It was a trying moment for the detective. He jumped to one side. Then he bounded past the men and ran toward the doorway, through which he had seen the procession enter.

A cry arose from the men.

When Everts uttered the cry of alarm, and when they beheld what Nick Carter had succeeded in doing, for a moment they were so astonished that they could not move.

Nick reached the door and made an effort to open it. His way was blocked, for the door was locked.

Failing to find the lock, the detective wheeled around, placed his back against the door and faced the infuriated men, who were making toward him.

He leveled his pistols at them.

Everts was at the head of the band. He was fifteen feet away from the detective, and his men were behind him.

As soon as the rascal saw that Nick Carter had him covered, he halted.

The men followed his example.

Furious oaths were uttered.

Everts put his hand into his pocket. He discovered that his pistol was not there, and he turned pale with fear.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE ELEVATOR.

Nick Carter, when he saw Everts turn pale and start back, knew that the rascal was unarmed.

"Throw up your arms, you villain!" he cried out, in stentorian tones.

And at the same time he pressed his fingers against the triggers of his revolvers.

At heart Everts was a coward. When everything was going his own way, and he had the upper hand, he could be brave. But when pressed into a corner, and he was in the power of some one, like all sneaks and rascals, he displayed his cowardly nature.

He looked at Nick Carter, and saw in the detective's face determination and courage.

Fully he realized his danger. Nick Carter would not hesitate to fire at him.

A murmur of dissatisfaction arose from the gang behind him.

"Up with your arms!" Nick cried out again.

Everts hesitated.

"Fool!"

Jack Vint gave utterance to this expression.

He was behind Everts.

This aroused the leader, and he made a move forward.

Nick saw it.

Bang!

The detective had fired.

Everts uttered a cry of pain and fell to the floor, wounded. It is safe to say his fear was so great that he imagined he had received his death wound.

Nick had not aimed to kill. He had only aimed to wound. The bullet had entered Everts' left shoulder.

The wounding of the greengoods man caused the gang to fall back. All of them knew that the detective was a dead-shot.

He had surprised them by his sudden movements, and he held them at such a disadvantage that they had not been able to draw their own weapons, and if they had been able to do so, it is doubtful if they would have succeeded in getting a chance to shoot.

Nick had a faculty of being able to grasp every opportunity which was presented to him.

When Vint spoke the detective recognized his voice, and he located the rascal.

As soon as Everts fell, Nick turned his eyes on Vint.

"Jack Vint, step forward!" he exclaimed.

At the same time he leveled his revolver at Vint.

Vint started. He had not expected any such move. He did not think that Nick was aware of his presence.

Looking at the young man, he saw the revolver pointed at his breast.

Before him was Everts, writhing in agony.

Nick Carter would surely treat him in the same way as he had treated Everts, unless he obeyed him.

"Come, now, no fooling," Nick ejaculated.

"I——" Vint blurted out.

He could say no more. There was a lump in his throat.

Nick watched not only Vint, but the gang, also. He saw that there was a disposition on the part of the rascals to make a dash for him.

"The first one who moves, gets a bullet in his brain," he exclaimed, and he turned one of his pistols toward the gang.

All were cowed now, and no one moved.

"Jack Vint, are you going to mind me?" Nick asked, in a tone which implied that if he were not obeyed, serious consequences would follow.

"I—I—I——" Vint ejaculated, and trembled like an aspen leaf.

"Move!"

"What—do—do—y-o-u wa-wa-n-t me—to—to do?"

"Unlock this door."

Vint hesitated.

Everts had fainted from loss of blood. The gang was without a leader.

"Will you do as I order?" Nick asked.

"Ye-ye-yes!" Vint answered, and he stepped forward.

"Quick, now; get a move on you."

"I will."

Vint stepped up to the left-hand corner of the room.

He placed his foot upon a stone in the floor and pressed down on it. Slowly the door began to swing open.

Nick Carter immediately stepped in the doorway, but even with the door open he did not know which way to turn. He needed a guide.

It did not take him long to make up his mind. Vint should act as his guide.

"Step here, Jack Vint," Nick ordered.

"What for?" the rascal asked

"Never you mind."

"I've opened the door."

"Come here."

It was a tone of authority in which the detective spoke.

Vint glanced at the gang. None of them could help him.

He moved slowly toward Nick and the detective stepped to one side.

"Ahead of me, please," he said.

Vint moved into the next room.

Nick followed.

As soon as he was within the room, he closed and locked the door.

He was none too soon. The gang had made a dash forward toward the door as soon as his back was turned, but they reached it too late. Nick had succeeded in locking it a moment before the foremost threw himself against it. The detective heard their oaths and smiled. He could imagine what their chagrin must be.

He turned toward Vint.

"Now, you villain, show me the way out of this infernal hole," he exclaimed, and at the same time he caught hold of Vint's mask and tore it from off his face.

Vint's face was a sight to behold. It was black with anger.

He uttered an oath, and made a movement with his hand, as if to draw a weapon.

"None of that!" Nick ejaculated.

He grasped Vint's wrist. His grip was like a steel vise. With a quick jerk he wrung the rascal's arm around until it cracked. Vint cried out with pain. It seemed to him as if his arm was paralyzed. He could not use it.

Nick released him.

"Will you mind now?" the detective demanded.

Loud blows were heard on the door. The gang were trying to break it down.

"Move!" Nick ordered.

Vint stepped forward.

In silence he opened the outer door and led the way into the outer passage. He was contemplating an act of treachery, but Nick was able to read what was passing in the man's mind.

"I'll give you fair warning that if you attempt to play me a trick," he said, "it will go hard with you."

Vint did not reply, but moved forward along the passage.

The elevator was reached.

Nick looked up. He saw what kind of an arrangement it was. It worked with chains. Vint pulled one of the chains. The elevator began to descend and reached the floor.

Nick got onto it with Vint.

Just then, as he started the elevator up, a cry arose at the other end of the passage. The gang had succeeded in breaking down the door. They were in full pursuit.

The elevator was halfway up to the top.

Their oaths were plainly distinguishable. If they should be able to recapture him, they would show him no mercy.

Nick saw the men. They were howling with rage. Would the elevator reach the top before they came up?

Nick glanced up.

The sound of an electric bell ringing caught his ear. Vint made a move. What did the ringing of that bell indicate? Nick asked himself that question. He scented danger. Was that bell a signal to some one in the room above? It must be, the detective told himself. Whether it was a signal or not, he must be prepared to meet any emergency.

He kept his eye on Vint.

Grasping his revolvers tight and placing his fingers on the triggers, he stood ready to fire at a moment's warning.

It was well that he was prepared. As he looked up for a second time he saw the face of a man peering down at him. It was a villainous face.

The elevator was almost to the top.

Now the form of the man was disclosed, and the detective saw that the rascal held a rifle in his hand, and that it was pointed down at him.

CHAPTER VIII.

A HOT ENCOUNTER.

It was a trying moment for the detective when he beheld the man at the top of the hatch, and saw that he had him covered with the rifle.

The men below had almost reached the elevator.

Vint showed no disposition to spring at Nick.

The man with the rifle had his finger pressed upon the trigger.

Nick did not permit the grass to grow under his feet. One minute's delay would be fatal. Unless he acted promptly, he would be a dead man or seriously wounded.

Vint made a movement forward. As quick as a flash of light Nick's fist shot out. He struck Jack Vint squarely between the eyes.

The elevator was seven feet from the top.

Vint shot through the space between the elevator and the floor, and fell on top of the heads of the men below, knocking several of them down.

Nick turned toward the man at the top. The rascal was about to fire. The detective's head was on a level with the rifle.

Just then one of the gang grasped the side chains, and the elevator stopped.

The man with the rifle pressed the trigger.

Nick knocked the weapon up. The ball flew over his head. He was none too soon. Instantly he sprang up, and he landed by the man's side. With a quick movement he wrenched the rifle out of the rascal's grasp.

Then he and the man clinched in a deadly embrace.

The sound of clinking chains was heard. Nick knew what this meant. The elevator was descending. Unless he succeeded in overcoming the man with whom he had clinched, the gang would be upon him. The fellow was powerfully built, and considerably heavier than the detective. His strength was like that of a giant. But, though the man was heavier and stronger than Nick, he did not possess the detective's agility and science.

Nick wriggled like an eel. It was hard for his adversary to retain his hold on him.

Like an infuriated wild beast, the man roared with rage when he discovered that he was unable to throw the young man.

The elevator touched the floor below. The gang crowded into it. One of the men pulled the chain, and the elevator moved upward.

Nick heard what had taken place. His position was more dangerous than it had been before.

The man pressed him toward the open hatch. Only a few feet intervened between him and the opening in the floor. All of the rascal's strength was exerted. Nick tried to plant his feet upon the floor.

"There!" the detective's antagonist exclaimed.

"And there you are!" Nick replied.

At the same time the detective caught hold of the man's left side with his right hand, gave him a jerk to one side, and then, exerting all of his strength, lifted the struggling scoundrel over his head, where he held him for a moment, and then let him fall into the open hatch.

It was a surprise to all who beheld the remarkable feat.

The elevator was almost to the top, and the heads of the gang were on a level with the floor.

The men uttered a cry of terror. All of them were thrown down as the detective's antagonist fell on top of them.

Nick did not stop to see what would follow. He made a dash for the door, only to find it locked.

A dozen shots were fired at him. They struck all around him, but not one hit him. He bore a charmed life.

The elevator reached the top, and the men jumped off and started toward Nick, who was fumbling with the bolts.

In wrestling with the man, Nick Carter had resorted to a trick. He had caught hold of the man's side over the sciatic nerve. This is the most sensitive and the weakest part of the human system. A slight clutch over this nerve, or a blow upon it, will almost paralyze one for the time being. All wrestlers know this, and they aim at clutching this particular spot, so that when they do get hold of it they may have the advantage over their adversary.

Nick shot back the upper bolt and cast a glance at the men. They were thirty feet away from him. Every moment was precious.

One more bolt barred the way. Nick caught hold of it. Three turns he gave it. It worked hard.

"Down with him!"

"Kill him!"

"Show him no mercy!"

These and various other expressions were uttered by the men.

Several of them fired at Nick Carter for the second time.

A bullet whirred by the detective's head and it clipped off a piece of his hat. An inch nearer it would have wounded him in the head. The situation was a decidedly unpleasant and warm one at that moment.

Nick pushed the bolt back at last and threw the door open. A minute afterward he was in the street.

The gang followed him. At that time of night the street was deserted. Nick ran toward the avenue. He reached the corner and turned down the street.

Glancing back after he had reached the center of the block, he saw that the gang had stopped following him.

He halted, and for a few moments was undecided what to do.

Should he return to the den and see what the men would do, or should he go on to the police station, secure assistance and raid the place?

Before he could reach the police station and return, he told himself, they would no doubt have made good their escape.

This being the case, the detective made a rapid change in his disguise, and then started back for the Eagle's Nest.

He was anxious to learn more about the gang, of which Ben Everts was the head.

None of them might have anything to do with the dis-

appearance of John Jacob Askwith, but still they were a band of rascals, who had some kind of nefarious schemes on hand, and, as a detective, Nick Carter considered it was his duty to learn more about them; and if he could discover evidence which would convict them of the committal of any crimes, he ought to do what he could to have them punished.

Vint and Everts were dangerous scoundrels. The public would be benefited if they were locked up behind prison bars.

Reasoning in this way, Nick lost no time in getting back to the stables.

The doors were locked. He looked through the window into the office, but no one was there.

The detective tried the window. To his surprise, it was not fastened. He was able to raise the sash, which he did.

Examining his revolvers, and finding that they were loaded, he next crawled through the window into the office.

Cautiously he opened the door leading into the stable, and on the threshold he paused and listened. The silence of the grave pervaded the place. The stable was pitch dark. Nick pulled out his dark lantern and threw the light into the stable.

No one was there, as far as he was able to discern. All the stalls were empty. They had the appearance of not having been used for a considerable time.

Nick stepped into the stable and walked up to the corner where the elevator was. The elevator was down.

Nick bent over the opening.

After listening for a time, and hearing nothing, he concluded to let himself down into the passage.

Catching hold of the chains which worked the elevator, the detective began to climb down them. The undertaking was a hazardous one. He did not know but what at any moment he might be surprised by some of the gang, who might be on guard. It seemed like a foolhardy thing for him to do, single-handed. If he had had any one with him, who would have been able to render assistance if he were attacked, it might have been different. But Nick Carter did not think of the danger of his undertaking.

He reached the passage without any one intercepting him.

Having been once along the passage, he was familiar with its turnings. Closing the slide over the face of his lantern, he proceeded to make his way along the passage in the dark.

The door opening from the passage into the room was reached by the detective.

Upon the threshold Nick paused and glanced about the place.

A dim light was burning on the corner-table. The room was in confusion. The doors of the closet stood open. The closet was empty. In a corner an empty closet stood open. The door of the meeting room was open. Nick could see the furnace. The fire was still burning. But there was all else removed in the room.

All the rest of the paraphernalia had been removed. The gang must have done quick work in clearing out the place of the furniture.

Nick saw a door behind the platform standing open and he walked toward it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "HERALD" PERSONAL.

The detective reached the door behind the platform without molestation. It did not take him long to discover where this led to. A room was beyond.

Nick Carter walked into it. At the side he discovered a flight of stairs, and these he ascended.

In a few minutes he stood in the yard behind the stable. A gate, which opened into the side street, was open. In the earth in the yard were the tracks of a wagon's wheels. The gang had escaped by this way, and had carted off all their things with them.

They must have had a horse and wagon in the yard in readiness for just such an emergency as that which had taken place.

On looking around the yard, the detective saw a shed at one side. When he looked into it he saw a stall, and there were evidences of its having been in use recently. The men had covered up their tracks well.

Nick saw that it was no use to remain longer in the vicinity. None of the men would dare to return to the rendezvous. They were badly frightened.

As long as they knew that he was alive, and that he would be on the lookout for them, they would remain under cover.

They would endeavor to entrap him, and he must exercise great caution. Every step he took would be dangerous. Nick was familiar with Vint and Everts' methods. Both of these men were capable of doing the most diabolical things.

Nick saw that he could do nothing more that night.

After such an exciting adventure as that through which he had just passed, he was tired out and needed rest.

When he reached his home he went direct to his room. On his desk he saw a note.

After he had opened it he discovered that it was from Mr. Reginald van Schaick.

It was just a request for Nick to call upon the writer at his earliest convenience.

The reader will remember what inspired the writing of this note.

But Nick did not know what had caused Mr. Van Schaick to write to him, and he was greatly puzzled.

"What can he desire to see me about?" he muttered, as he glanced at the note.

He looked at his watch. It was four o'clock in the morning.

"I can't see him for several hours," he exclaimed, "so I might as well turn in and get some rest."

He set the alarm clock at eight o'clock, examined the fastenings of the doors and windows to see that they were all right, and finding that they were secure, the detective went to bed and was soon fast asleep.

When the alarm sounded, Nick awoke and jumped out of bed.

He took a cold shower bath, rubbed himself down, after which he felt as fresh as a young, unbroken colt, and was ready for the day's work.

He ate a hearty breakfast at a restaurant and then proceeded to Mr. Van Schaick's residence.

Mr. Van Schaick was in his library, and Nick was conducted into his presence by a pretty French maid.

The old gentleman was pacing up and down the room when the detective entered.

He was in a state of great mental excitement.

"You have come at last," Mr. Van Schaick ejaculated when he beheld the detective, and then he sank down into his chair in front of his desk. "I've been waiting for you all night long."

"If I had known that, I should have called the instant I received your note," Nick replied. "I did not get it until four o'clock this morning, and then I thought that you were in bed."

"Not so. I've been up all night."

"What has happened?"

Mr. Van Schaick gave Nick a detailed account of old Moses Slavinski's visit, and said:

"I sent William Vance, my butler, to follow the Jew and he has not yet returned."

"You should not have done that," Nick said.

"Why not?"

"Because the rascal would get onto him, and he, no doubt, has led Vance into a trap."

"I'll go and have the villain arrested."

"You must not do that."

"Why not?"

"Are you willing to be governed by me?"

"Certainly."

"Then rest easy and let me deal with Moses."

"Do you know the scoundrel?"

"I do."

Nick Carter smiled at the question.

Did the detective know Moses Slavinski?

We should say that he did.

There was hardly a detective in New York, who amounted to anything, who did not know the Jew.

Nick had had several tussles with Moses, and he knew him to be one of the slickest old rascals in the city.

"You smile," Mr. Van Schaick ejaculated, in a petulant tone.

"I could not help it," Nick replied, apologetically.

"What do you know about Slavinski?"

"He is a fence."

"Indeed!"

"He has dealings with all the crooks in the city, and often acts as their go-between."

"Why don't the police send him to State's prison?"

"For the simple reason that they have never been able to fasten anything on him."

"They don't want to."

"Oh, yes, they do."

"Then why don't they entrap him?"

"Because he is as slippery as an eel. When they think they have him tight in their clutches, he always manages to slip away."

"It's strange."

"You wouldn't think so if you were acquainted with his methods."

"Do you think he will call on me again?"

"No; he will not."

"Why not?"

"Because he has discovered that you intend to entrap him, from the fact of you having sent your butler to follow him."

"What is to be done?"

"I must think about the matter."

"Wouldn't it be well for me to send him a note and tell him that I will pay the money?"

"He wouldn't answer it now."

"Well, what do you want?"

This question was addressed to the maid, who had just then opened the door.

"Mrs. Askwith desires to see you," the maid answered.

Mr. Van Schaick glanced at Nick.

"Show Mrs. Askwith in," Nick directed, and then, turning to Mr. Van Schaick, he said: "I suppose you have no objection?"

"Not at all," Mr. Van Schaick replied.

Mrs. Askwith entered the room, and the maid left.

"Oh, Mr. Carter, I am glad that you are here," the old lady ejaculated, as soon as she beheld the detective. "I've heard from John."

"You have heard from Mr. Askwith!" the detective and Mr. Van Schaick exclaimed, simultaneously.

"Here is a note which I received in this morning's mail, and I hastened here to consult you, Mr. Van Schaick, as soon as I had read it."

"Give it to Mr. Carter and let him read it aloud," Mr. Van Schaick said.

Mrs. Askwith handed Nick the letter.

The detective glanced over it, his eyes began to twinkle, and then he commenced to read:

"NEW YORK.

"DEAR MADAM: Your son is safe for the present, but he will not be safe unless you order Nick Carter to stop his search for him, and you comply with our demands. If you value your son's life you will agree to pay us, in cash (cash, mind you, no check), the sum of five hundred thousand dollars. You can consider this matter, and if you desire to negotiate with us, you can insert a personal in the *New York Herald*, addressed to 'Safety.' Beware how you trifle with us! Do not dare to show this note to the police—if you do, your son will not live twenty-four hours. To show that we mean business, you will find a note from your son appended herewith. SAFETY."

On the other side of the paper was the following in John Jacob Askwith's handwriting, which Nick read:

"DEAR MOTHER: I am a prisoner in a vile den. I am in the power of a band of men. They want money to release me. Your son, JOHN."

"Ahem!"

Mr. Van Schaick cleared his throat.

He and Mrs. Askwith looked anxiously at Nick when the detective finished reading.

Nick's face was serious. He failed to recognize the handwriting of "Safety."

The question uppermost in his mind was how he should best proceed. It was a matter which required great thought. He had to deal with a gang of rascals who would not hesitate to carry out any threat they made.

CHAPTER X.

NICK IS PUZZLED.

Nick Carter was silent for a considerable time.

Anxiously Mr. Van Schaick and Mrs. Askwith waited for him to speak. Both of them displayed great nervousness.

Nick looked up.

"Are both of you willing to leave this matter with me entirely?" the detective inquired.

"I am," Mr. Van Schaick replied.

"So am I," Mrs. Askwith reiterated.

"You will follow my instructions implicitly?" Nick asked.

We will," both replied.

"I have a plan."

"What is it?" Mrs. Askwith asked.

"You must insert a personal in the *Herald*, Mrs. Askwith."

"What must I do?" Mr. Van Schaick inquired.

"Nothing for the present."

"But, sir——"

"You promised to be directed by me."

"I'm an older man than you, Mr. Carter——"

"I am aware of that, sir. I have great respect for your years, but I am older in experience than you are, when it comes to dealing with criminals."

"True—true."

"Then follow my advice."

"Very well."

Mr. Van Schaick subsided.

Nick now turned to Mrs. Askwith.

"As I was saying," he remarked, "you must insert the personal in the *Herald*."

"What must I say?" Mrs. Askwith asked.

"I will write the personal."

"Do so."

Nick took a seat at the desk and wrote upon a slip of paper which Mr. Van Schaick handed him.

When he finished writing, he read:

"SAFETY: Your letter was received, but your demands are exorbitant. I will discharge C, and have nothing to do with the others. I am willing to pay a reasonable amount. H. A."

"But that will be a falsehood," Mrs. Askwith ejaculated, when Nick concluded reading the personal.

"I am aware of that," Nick replied, "but I think that under the circumstances such a trick is justifiable."

"Mr. Carter, I always believe in telling the truth. I——"

"Madam, consider that your son's life is in danger."

"I do—I do——"

"What do you hope to gain by the publication of this personal?" Mr. Van Schaick asked.

"I am in hope the rascals will show their hands," the detective replied.

"Do you believe they will?"

"We can make the trial."

"True."

"If they do not reply to this, then I will try some other method."

"Have you any idea who these villains are?"

"I have a suspicion."

"Who are they?"

"For the present I prefer not to answer that question, for I may be wrong."

"Have your own way."

"If these people send a reply to this personal, what am I to do?" Mrs. Askwith asked.

"I will tell you what to do when you receive the reply," Nick rejoined.

"How am I to communicate with you? You cannot visit me at my home."

"Have you an extra latchkey to your front door?"

"I have."

"Give it to me."

"Here it is."

"Now I can get into your house without ringing the doorbell. You may expect to see me at any time. I am likely to appear in various disguises, so do not be surprised."

"The servants may see you."

"Leave that to me. I'll take good care that the servants do not see me."

"When may I expect to see you?"

"At any time; perhaps when you least expect me I will present myself to you. It will be well for you to remain in your room, after you return home from here."

"Shall I take this personal to the *Herald* office?"

"You had better do so. We can't tell what these scoundrels may be up to. You may have been followed here."

Mrs. Askwith arose, and, after bidding Mr. Van Schaick and Nick good-by, she departed.

When the detective was alone once more with Mr. Van Schaick, he said:

"Mr. Van Schaick, I want to ask you a few questions."

"You are at liberty to ask me any question you may see fit, and I will answer it to the best of my ability," the old gentleman rejoined.

"Have you an enemy?"

"What do you mean? You asked me that question once before."

"I want to know if you can think of any one who would do you an injury through your daughter."

"Not a soul."

"What other gentlemen were paying attention to your daughter besides Askwith?"

"I don't understand you."

"Had your daughter any other lover? Was there any one who wanted her to become his wife?"

"Really—I——"

"Surely you can think of some one in society who was a suitor for your daughter's hand?"

"I—I——"

Nick looked at Mr. Van Schaick sharply.

The old gentleman's face was crimson. He moved about in his chair uneasily. He could not look the detective in the face. What did this hesitancy on Mr. Van Schaick's part indicate?

Nick did not know what to think.

Was Evelyn's father concealing something from him?

It was remarkable that Mr. Van Schaick should attempt to dodge a straightforward question like that asked by the detective.

Nick thought for a moment.

Then he asked:

"Mr. Van Schaick, who was the gentleman who took your daughter to the opera last Friday evening? I mean the man who sat in front of you."

"W-h-a-t—wha—wha-t?" Mr. Van Schaick stammered and started from his seat.

Nick Carter's eyes were fastened upon him.

The detective had been present at the opera on the evening referred to, and now he remembered having seen a tall, slim, dark-complexioned man seated by Evelyn's side in the Van Schaick box during the performance, and it occurred to him to make some inquiries about this man.

He had not paid much attention to this man, only having given him a passing glance, but he thought that he would be able to recognize him if he should ever run across him again.

Before asking the question in regard to this man it did not occur to the detective that Mr. Van Schaick would become so affected.

The old gentleman turned pale.

He gasped and stared at Nick.

It was only momentary, however, that he acted in this way.

After making a successful effort to compose himself, he said:

"I can't imagine whom you refer to, Mr. Carter. I am sure there was no one in my box at the opera last Friday night except my daughter and myself."

Nick knew now that Mr. Van Schaick was concealing something else; why would he try to deny that there had been any one in his box beside his daughter and himself, when he knew well that a man had sat by Evelyn's side during all the evening.

It was curious.

Nick was at a loss to account for this strange action.

"You forget, Mr. Van Schaick," the detective rejoined, in a quiet tone, and he did not show that he suspected Mr. Van Schaick of playing a part or concealing anything.

"I never forget," Mr. Van Schaick answered, testily.

"Let me recall something to your mind, and then you may remember. I was in the house at the time."

Mr. Van Schaick looked annoyed.

A worried expression was in his eyes.

"Well?" he ejaculated.

"During the second act of 'Faust,' when the whole house was silent while *Marguerite* was singing, this gentleman sneezed. It sounded throughout the whole house.

"You started from your chair and said something to him in an angry tone. He shrugged his shoulders, turned to your daughter, said something to her, and then riveted his attention upon the scene."

"Confound it!"

"What?"

"Yes—yes; I—I remember now," Mr. Van Schaick replied, with evident confusion. "You are right, Mr. Carter. It was last Friday night. I thought that that happened two weeks ago. I'm so flustered by my daughter's absence that my memory is liable to play me a trick. It was last Friday night. The gentleman was the Baron Adolph von Bremer, a young German nobleman. He was on a visit here. I entertained him."

"Is he still in the city?"

"Ahem! I really—really, I don't know."

"Was he attentive to your daughter?"

"No—no, not at all. I——"

"I guess I'll go."

Mr. Van Schaick got up from his chair.

He gave a sigh of relief. It was evident that he was glad to break off the conversation just then. He did not want to talk about the Baron von Bremer.

At that moment the maid knocked at the door, and opening it, announced: "Mr. Seneca Barker." Mr. Van Schaick uttered an exclamation. He turned pale and staggered back, clutching the edge of the desk for support.

Nick Carter rushed up to his side.

"Are you ill, sir?" the detective inquired, solicitously.

"No, no. Please leave me, now," Mr. Van Schaick answered, as he recovered quickly.

Nick was mystified.

He turned, and was about to leave the room, when he beheld, standing in the doorway, the man whom he had seen with Mr. Van Schaick and his daughter at the opera, and whom the merchant had said was Baron von Bremer, but whom the maid had announced as Seneca Barker.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BARON VON BREMER.

Nick Carter did not appear to notice Mr. Van Schaick's nervousness.

He looked at the man standing in the doorway, bowed to him and passed out of the room.

Who was this Seneca Barker? The detective asked himself this question as he passed through the hallway.

It seemed strange to him that Evelyn's father would tell him a deliberate falsehood about this man.

He was confident that this man was the one whom he had seen in the box at the opera with Mr. Van Schaick and his daughter, and whom the merchant had told him was the Baron Adolph von Bremer.

The detective imagined, as I passed Barker, that the man had given him a black look. He wanted to know more about Barker. As far as he could remember, he had never seen this man before.

Did Barker have any hold on Mr. Van Schaick? If he had no hold on him, why should the merchant appear so nervous and annoyed when the maid announced him?

Nick Carter passed out of the house.

Something seemed to tell him that he ought to look after this man. How was he to do it?

He would have liked to be a witness of the interview between Mr. Van Schaick and Barker. But that was impossible now.

At the corner the detective halted.

"I'll wait about here until that man leaves the house and then I will follow him," he ejaculated, after a while, and then he stepped into a doorway, where he made a rapid change in his appearance, after which he returned to the corner.

Half an hour passed. Barker did not come out of the mansion. His interview with Mr. Van Schaick must have been important or it would not have consumed so much time.

Nick moved about uneasily. He would have given a great deal to have been concealed some place in the library.

Three-quarters of an hour went by. Still the man remained within the house. It was exasperating to Nick.

He conjectured all manner of things about Barker.

Why could not Mr. Van Schaick have been open with him?

Finally Barker came out.

He walked down the front stoop, and then, after glancing hastily up and down the street, he hurried off.

Nick quickly crossed to the opposite side of the street and proceeded to follow Barker.

The detective centered all of his attention upon the man, and he used every precaution so Barker would not discover that he was being tracked.

Already Nick had formed a prejudice against his quarry in his mind.

Why he should do so he could not tell.

Surely this man could have no connection with the disappearance of Askwith and Evelyn van Schaick.

What could he possibly know about the matter?

Nick pondered over this question.

Several times he was on the point of dropping the trail, but an irresistible force seemed to impel him forward.

"I can't understand it," he reasoned; "it is curious. But there is a voice whispering in my ear telling me not to let this man out of my sight, and yet——"

Here Nick stopped short in his soliloquy.

He had followed Barker down to the Holland House, which he was about to enter.

Few people were in front of the hotel.

Barker stopped in the doorway. He looked about him as if in search of some one. Not seeing any person whom he recognized, he entered the hotel.

Nick Carter was close behind him.

Barker went straight up to the office desk.

"Has any one called for me?" he inquired of the clerk.

Several persons were standing around the desk at the time, and this gave the detective a chance to draw near, so that he could overhear the conversation without being observed.

"There was a man here an hour ago who asked to see you, baron," the clerk replied.

"Baron!" Nick mentally ejaculated. "The clerk calls him baron."

"Did he leave any word for me?" Barker asked.

"He said that he would call again," the clerk answered.

"Is there any mail?"

"There are several letters."

Nick was standing by Barker's side when the clerk passed the letters to him.

The detective pretended to be examining the names upon the page of the register, but in reality he had one eye upon Barker, and he was able to read the superscription upon the top letter.

It was:

"Baron Adolph von Bremer,
"Holland House,
"New York."

So this man was known as the Baron von Bremer, and Mr. Van Schaick did not tell a falsehood.

But why should this man assume the alias of Seneca Barker?

Why should he have himself announced to Mr. Van Schaick as Seneca Barker, when he was the Baron von Bremer?

It was curious.

Von Bremer was a German name.

Mr. Van Schaick had told Nick that the man was a German nobleman, and yet, so far as the detective had been able to observe, he had none of the traces of a foreigner about him, and he spoke English with the fluency of an American.

Besides, his manners and air were those of an American.

The detective was more deeply interested in the man now than he had ever been before.

After receiving the letters, Barker stepped to one side and proceeded to read them.

Nick Carter leaned against a pillar and watched him intently.

Barker paid no attention to the detective.

His mind was busy with something else.

Not for a moment did he suspect that he was being watched by one of the shrewdest detectives in the metropolis.

After reading his letter, he went to the cigar stand and bought a cigar.

While he was engaged in lighting the weed he was approached by a tall man, who laid his hand upon his arm and said something to him in an undertone.

He started.

Then he looked at the man in surprise, but he quickly recovered himself, and taking the man's arm, he walked with him toward the elevator, which he and his companion entered.

"Well, I'll be blowed!" Nick Carter ejaculated, as he witnessed the scene, and after Barker and his companion had started upstairs in the elevator.

CHAPTER XII.

NICK LISTENS.

Nick Carter stood for a moment in the doorway of the café, staring at Barker and his companion, and then, after he had uttered the exclamation recorded in the last chapter, he stepped up to the desk and began to examine the register.

He was looking for the name of Baron von Bremer.

At last he found it.

He made a note of the number of the room which Von Bremer or Barker (whichever his name was) occupied, and then, turning to the clerk, he asked:

"Can you let me have a front room on the second floor?"

Nick was familiar with the house. He knew how the rooms were situated, and it was his desire to get a room near Barker's.

"No. 315 is vacant," the clerk rejoined, after he had looked over his list.

"That will do," Nick replied.

Certainly it would do. A smile of satisfaction lighted up the detective's face.

Fortune favored him. The room adjoined Barker's.

"Do you desire to go up?" the clerk inquired.

"I do," Nick answered.

A hall boy was called and instructed to conduct Nick to the room.

In five minutes the detective was ensconced in the apartment.

He locked the door and then he began to look around him. At the left side of the room was a door. It stood partly open. The detective approached it and looked through the crack.

A closet was beyond. Nick opened the door wide and entered the closet.

At the back was a window. It was several feet above the floor and partly open.

Nick Carter paused and listened. He heard voices. The window opened into the next room.

That room was occupied by Barker and the man who had accompanied him upstairs.

From his pocket the detective took a pair of felt slippers. These he put over his shoes, so that his footsteps would not be heard as he moved about.

He returned to the room and secured a chair. This he placed with great care under the window.

Not a noise did the detective make. He hardly dared to breathe.

Now he mounted the chair and stood erect. His eyes were on a level with the window sill. Pulling the curtain to one side, he looked into the next room. Everything was plainly visible to him.

There was Barker and his companion seated at the table in the center of the room. They were engaged in earnest conversation, and spoke in low tones.

Until now Nick Carter had made no effort to hear what they were saying.

Now he proceeded to listen.

Every word came to him distinctly.

It was Barker whom he heard first.

Barker's companion's back was turned toward the detective.

Nick was not able to see the man's face now, but he had got a good look at it while he was in the corridor of the hotel.

When the detective uttered the exclamation downstairs he thought that he recognized the man.

Now, as he looked at the man's back, studied the shape of his head, and beheld his left hand, which rested upon the table, he was confident that he knew him.

Barker rested his arms on the side of the chair, and, leaning forward, said:

"You are right, Vint."

Nick smiled as he heard this. His suspicions about Barker's companion were confirmed. The man was Jack Vint.

He was carefully disguised, but for all that, the detective had been able to penetrate the disguise.

As soon as he heard Barker mention Vint's name, Nick was deeply interested.

Vint was silent for some time. He drummed on the top of the table with his fingers, and gazed at Barker.

"Well," Vint ejaculated, at last, as he stopped drumming, "I'm glad that you agree with me, Seneca. You see, we will have to move very cautiously in these matters, and we cannot afford to take any unnecessary risks. The game is a hazardous one, but the stake is large, and it is worth while striving to secure it. It will not be safe for me to do anything openly as long as Nick Carter is alive."

"True," Barker replied.

"After last night's fiasco, Carter will be on our trail like a bloodhound following up the trail of an escaped negro slave."

"I'd like to know how much this fellow knows."

"So would I."

"He was at Van Schaick's when I called."

"Did he see you?"

"He did."

"And you saw him?"

"Yes—but he was disguised."

"Then how do you know that it was he?"

"Van Schaick told me when he left the library."

"Do you think that Carter suspected you?"

"Not at all."

"How do you know?"

"I looked around me when I left the house, and saw nothing of him."

"Did Van Schaick mention you to him?"

"I asked Van Schaick if he had told the detective anything about my acquaintance with his daughter."

"What did he say?"

"He said that he had not mentioned a word about me to Carter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why do you laugh?"

"I cannot help it."

"Why?"

"It makes me laugh when I think of how you have been able to bamboozle the old chap——"

"Let that drop."

"You needn't be so crusty."

"I'm not crusty."

"How was the old coon?"

"So so. He'd been up all night."

"You sympathized with him, I suppose."

"Certainly."

"Did you put the screws on him?"

"Not yet."

"Why not?"

"It is too soon."

"Bosh!"

"No, it is not bosh. Van Schaick is afraid of me. I don't want to screw him down just at present."

"If I had him in my power as you have him I'd pinch him, you may bet."

"And in that way you'd ruin yourself."

"Well, you and Everts have some peculiar ways."

"And it is on account of our peculiar ways that we succeed so well."

"It may be."

"Let us return to what we were talking about before we began to digress."

"I'm agreeable."

"Is Everts seriously wounded?"

"No; he'll be all right in a day or so."

"Where is he?"

"He was taken home by Elmora."

"That girl is a nuisance."

"So I've told Everts."

"He won't let her go?"

"No; he imagines that if he were to get rid of her he would be ruined."

"Is there anything in what he claims, that she is possessed of great clairvoyant power?"

"Oh, yes."

"I must go and see him, and get him to place her under control for me."

"Do you want to find out something?"

"I do."

"Then Elmora will be able to do it."

The detective was surprised at what he had overheard. How and when did these two men become acquainted? What was the reason Mr. Van Schaick feared this man Barker? What was the conspiracy which they had on foot?

So far they had not spoken plainly about their plans. Their conversation was only fragmentary.

But Nick Carter was made acquainted with one fact, and that was—both of these men were afraid of him.

They were engaged in some conspiracy. It might not have anything to do with the disappearance of Evelyn and Askwith. But it did relate to Mr. Van Schaick.

"Have you any money, Seneca?" Jack Vint inquired, after the silence had lasted for over ten minutes.

"Why?" Barker asked, and he eyed Vint curiously.

"I want some."

"What for?"

"I have use for it."

"What use?"

"How can you ask that question? You ought to know."

"I ought to know?"

"Yes."

"I gave you money yesterday."

"What's a hundred dollars?"

"Not much, I suppose."

"Not when there is work to be done."

"What work?"

"The extermination of Nick Carter."

"Why money for that?"

"Because we will have to employ some one to do it."

"Employ some one? Haven't you and Everts men in your gang who will do it?"

"Not unless they are paid."

"How much will it take?"

"A thousand dollars."

"Look here, Vint, I don't want you or Everts to try to play me for a gudgeon. I'm no green fool. You and he are to share equally with me in this venture, and you ought to be willing to do something to help the matter along, and not expect me to put up all the dust. I've got very little money left, and I want to keep it."

"You won't put up?"

"No."

"Then we'll drop the whole thing."

"You will, eh?"

Barker's face had grown red with anger during the conversation, and his fingers twitched nervously.

He sprang forward, clutched Jack Vint by the throat, clinking him like a dog does a rat, and almost strangled the breath out of his body.

After shaking Vint until he was almost unconscious, Barker threw him down across a divan.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHADOWING THE BARON.

"That will teach you a lesson," Seneca Barker exclaimed, after he had cast Vint from him.

Vint struggled to an upright position.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

"I've got no time to explain," Barker retorted, as he strode up and down the room and fastened his eyes on Jack Vint, who quailed beneath his fiery glance. "But I give you fair warning, that unless you and Everts play square, I'll make it hot for both of you. Now——"

Barker stopped in his walk. He planted himself squarely in front of Vint. He raised his hand and shook his finger in front of Vint's face.

"You and Everts," he continued, "must undertake this job of getting Nick Carter out of the way, without calling on me to put up a dollar."

"You won't put up?" Vint queried.

"Not one cent."

"And you desire me to carry this message to Ben Everts?"

"I do."

"I know what his reply will be."

"What will it be?"

"He'll throw up the job."

"Let him dare to do it."

"What can you do?"

"Inside of twenty-four hours you and he will be landed in the Tombs on your way to State's prison."

And Barker leaned forward and hissed something in Jack Vint's ear.

Nick could not hear what he said.

But the detective saw Vint turn as pale as death, gasp and begin to shake as if he had been stricken with the palsy.

"Ha! ha! ha!" Seneca Barker chuckled. "Now you know what you have to expect if you do not obey me implicitly."

"Wh-wh-wh-ere did——" Vint stammered.

"Where did I learn that?"

"You——"

"I have all the evidence in my possession."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"And you would use it?"

"Certainly."

"Suppose we turned on you?"

"What could you do?"

"We——"

"You could do nothing."

Vint bit his lip.

Barker had spoken the truth.

Neither Vint nor Everts had any hold on him.

"I suppose we will have to obey," Vint snarled, as he stood up.

"Of course you will," Barker rejoined.

"Will you call on Everts?"

"To-night."

"At what hour?"

"I can't tell."

Vint looked out of the corner of his eye at Barker. He moved about uneasily.

Barker watched him for some minutes, and then ejaculated:

"What is it?"

"Seneca, I'm dead broke," Vint blurted out.

"Is that it?"

"Yes."

"You want some dough?"

"I do."

"How much?"

"Anything you please to give me."

"Well——"

Barker pulled a roll of bills out of his pocket.

He counted out several notes, and handing them to Jack Vint, he remarked:

"Here is two hundred. It is a loan. I'll charge this up against you, and when we come to divide the spoils, I'll deduct it out of your share."

"Thanks!" Vint murmured, as he put the money into his pocket.

"Now, be off."

Vint left the room.

Soon after, Nick Carter also went away.

He decided that Seneca Barker was the man he needed to watch.

Whatever the conspiracy was in which these rascals were engaged, Barker was the one who was fully cognizant of all the plans and the brains of it.

That evening Nick again went to the Holland House to find out what Barker was up to.

It was ten o'clock when he entered the hotel.

The corridors and café were crowded with people who had just come from the theatre.

He stepped up to the desk, and looked at the pigeon-hole in which the key to Barker's room rested.

The key was in the hole. This indicated that Barker was out.

The clerk was standing near.

"Is Baron von Bremer in?" the detective asked of the clerk.

"The baron left the hotel an hour ago," the clerk replied. "He paid his bill, took his baggage with him, and went off in a cab."

"Did he leave any address to which his mail is to be sent?"

"He did not. He was in a great hurry, and I guess he wanted to catch a train."

Nick strolled out of the hotel greatly chagrined.

When he reached the street a thought occurred to him.

The clerk said that Barker had gone away in a cab.

If he could find that cab he might learn something from the driver.

The detective looked at the cabs drawn up along the curb.

Which one did Barker take?

While debating which cabman to question, Nick spied a cab drive up to the stand.

He recognized the driver as the man whom he had frequently employed.

Immediately he decided to utilize him and get him to question the other drivers.

He hailed the cabman, and when he came up the detective stepped to one side with him.

"Business dull?" Nick asked, by way of opening the conversation.

"Oh, no," the man replied. "I've had two fares this evening."

"You have?"

"Yes. The last one was a foreign nobleman named Baron von Bremer, and he gave me a ten-dollar bill."

"A good fare."

"I should smile."

"How far did you have to drive him?"

"Not very far. I took him to a flat at No. — East Thirteenth Street."

The detective conversed with the driver a short while longer.

He had secured the information, and that was all he desired.

Nick bade the cabby good-night, and strolled off.

He took a car down to Thirteenth Street.

Then he went to the address where the cabman had stated that he had left the bogus baron.

The front door of the flat stood open.

Nick entered the vestibule and examined the letter boxes. On none of them was any name which he was able to recognize. There were upward of twenty flats in the house. The detective was in a quandry what to do.

Barker had entered this house if the cabman told the truth, and Nick was confident that he had.

The detective stepped out onto the sidewalk. He looked up at the front windows and examined them. Only a few flats were dark. This seemed to indicate that most of the people in the house were up.

The neighborhood was a bad one. In the vicinity were a number of thieves' dens. Nick was familiar with all of these. In several of them, at various times, he had met with a number of startling adventures.

He knew nothing about the people who inhabited this flat house. It had not been open long, having been erected about six months. All of the people might be decent and hard-working people, and yet there was a possibility that they were of the same stamp as those who lived in the other houses in the neighborhood.

A number of men and women passed the detective while he was standing on the sidewalk. Not desiring to excite suspicion, he crossed the street and stood in the shadow of a doorway opposite. During the time he was standing outside the house he had seen no one enter or come out.

While standing in the doorway, Nick made a change in his disguise. He examined his pistols to see if they were in working order, as the thought occurred to him that he might be called upon to use them.

If Seneca Barker was in that house, Nick was determined to find out in which flat he was, and what he was doing there. Barker must have some acquaintance in the house, or surely he would never have come to the place.

Thus the detective reasoned. But which flat had the rascal entered? That was the all-important question. Nick endeavored to think of some plan by which he could find this out. He could not search every flat in the house. Not knowing the character of the place, that would have been too hazardous.

While thinking about this matter, he saw two men coming down the street.

When they reached the house they stopped outside the

door. The light from the street lamp in front fell on them.

Their faces were plainly visible to Nick.

The instant he caught sight of them, he recognized the men. One was Dart Darrell. The other was Jack Vint.

For some time Vint and Darrell talked excitedly about something.

The detective could not hear what they were saying.

At last Darrell left his companion, and hurried off down the street.

Vint entered the house, and, as soon as he was within, the detective came out of his place of concealment.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PACKING BOX.

Nick Carter walked into the hall of the flat house.

It was dark.

He listened and could hear footsteps ascending the stairs. These were Vint's.

The rascal reached the first landing and paused.

Next Nick heard him rap on a door.

The detective looked up.

A moment after Vint knocked a flood of light illuminated the upper hall as a door was opened.

A female voice, which Nick recognized as Elmora's, exclaimed:

"We have been waiting for you, Jack. You're late."

The detective could not hear what reply Vint gave, as the rascal had entered the room, and the door was closed.

No sooner was the door closed than the detective ascended the stairs.

He reached the hall above and stood outside the door of the rear apartment, which Vint had entered.

He heard voices within. The sound indicated that several persons were in the room.

Nick stood close to the door and listened attentively. He was able to hear and he recognized the voices of Vint, Everts, Elmora and Barker. Now he knew that he was on the right track.

Everts was speaking.

Nick glanced through the keyhole.

He saw Everts seated in a large armchair in the center of the room. His back was in a sling.

"We have been waiting for your return anxiously, Vint," Everts said, in a low tone, but it was loud enough for the detective to hear.

"I was detained," Vint replied. "You can't imagine what a time I had with Darrell."

"What's the matter with him?" Seneca Barker demanded, in a sharp tone.

"At first he and the others wouldn't agree to undertake the job without they received some money in advance."

"He wouldn't, eh?"

"No."

"What did you tell him?"

"I made him a promise of a thousand dollars."

"You did?"

"I couldn't placate him in any other way."

"Then did he agree?"

"He did. But he wants the money as soon as the job is finished."

"I'll give it to him."

"He'll start to work to-morrow."

"Get us something to drink, Elmora. I'm terribly dry," Jack Vint concluded.

Elmora went to a closet and brought out a bottle and some glasses, which she placed on a table in front of the men.

All drank except the girl.

When they had drained their glasses, Everts said:

"Did you see the Jew, Vint?"

"I did," Jack Vint replied, and he lighted a cigar, which he puffed away on vigorously.

"What did he say?"

"He couldn't do anything with old Van Schaick."

"How was that?"

"The old fellow was as sharp as a fox. When the Jew left the house Van Schaick sent his butler to follow him."

"What did Moses do?"

"He led the fellow into a trap."

"Good!"

"Moses went into Larry Bryan's place and the butler followed him in. He gave some of the boys a tip, and they set upon the butler and almost beat him to death."

"What did they do then?"

"They chucked him out into the street, where a cop found him and took him to Bellevue Hospital."

"Fools!"

"How so?"

"He'll cause Larry trouble when he recovers."

"Not much."

"Why not?"

"Larry has taken care of that."

"In what way?"

"He has fixed it with some of the attendants at the hospital, so that if the butler shows signs of recovering, they are to ship him up to the insane asylum on Ward's Island."

"Will they do that?"

"Certainly."

"But he may escape."

"Not much."

A silence followed.

Nick Carter, after hearing what had been said by these rascals, knew now that he was on the right track.

These men had Evelyn van Schaick in their power. But where the girl was, they had not indicated in their conversation. Neither did they mention why they had abducted her.

The detective was elated over the discovery. He would be able now to block their game.

But what about John Jacob Askwith? They had not mentioned a word about the young millionaire. While they had abducted Evelyn, still there was the probability that they had had nothing to do with the disappearance of the young man.

"Why don't you try your powers on Nick Carter?" Jack Vint asked, after a time, turning to Everts.

"I will," Everts answered.

"I've just been thinking of something."

"What?"

"You ought to try and find out what the detective is doing now."

"I would, if Elmora was in any kind of condition."

"She appears all right."

"I'm not strong enough to stand any more strain to-night," Elmora said.

She spoke the truth. Her face was pale. There were dark rings under her eyes. She moved about the room with a languid air.

Vint looked annoyed. He was anxious to have her make a trial.

The rascal was not easy in his mind. If the truth were known, he was badly frightened. He dreaded Nick Carter, and he was afraid that the detective at that moment might be on their trail.

If he had known that the detective, at that moment, was peering through the keyhole of the door at him, he would have been unable to retain his seat.

Finding that he could not induce Elmora or Everts to make a trial of their powers, Jack Vint got up and said:

"I guess I'll be going."

"What time will you be here to-morrow?" Barker inquired.

"Probably not before afternoon."

"I'm going to remain here for a day or so."

Vint started toward the door.

Nick Carter withdrew to the other side of the hall.

A large case was standing there.

The detective concealed himself behind it.

The door of the apartment opened.

Jack Vint stepped out.

He bade his companions good-night and started downstairs.

Elmora stood by the banisters. She watched Vint until he left the house. Then she turned to go back into the room. Upon the threshold she stopped. Her hand went up to her head and she uttered an exclamation of terror.

This brought Everts and Barker to her side.

With another cry, Elmora began to stagger. Then she fell forward into Seneca Barker's arms—unconscious.

"She has fainted," Everts exclaimed. "The strain has been too much for her. Bring her in and lay her down on the lounge."

Barker carried the girl into the room and Everts closed the door.

After working over her for some time the men succeeded in restoring Elmora to consciousness.

She raised herself upon her elbow and looked around the room. There was terror in her eyes.

"What is the matter?" Everts asked.

"The—detective!" Elmora gasped.

"What about him?" Everts and Barker asked, at the same time.

"He was in the hall crouching behind the packing box at the end. I saw him in a vision; I tried to tell you, and some power forced me to faint."

Barker whipped out his revolver.

Everts followed his example.

Both swore furiously.

They threw open the door, rushed out into the hall, and up to the packing box behind which Nick Carter had concealed himself.

CHAPTER XV.

VAN SCHAICK'S BUTLER.

Barker pulled the case aside.

No one was there.

He and Everts looked at each other.

For a few moments neither spoke.

Barker broke the silence.

"What do you think, Everts?" he asked, in a trembling tone of voice.

"It was one of the girl's delusions," Everts replied, and he led the way back into the room, where he said to Elmora:

"You were mistaken, Ellie; no one was behind the case."

"He was there," Elmora cried out, with excited gestures. "I saw him there; he escaped while the door was closed. Go down and look in the street."

"I'll go," Barker said, and he hurried down to the street.

Barker looked up and down the street, examined the areas and doorways of the adjoining houses, but found no one.

He returned to the room, where he told Elmora and Everts that he could find no trace of any one.

Still Elmora was not convinced.

She insisted that she had seen Nick Carter, and she declared that she would not remain another hour in the house.

Her fears worked upon her companions, and, at last, they decided to leave the flat and proceed to a resort of the gang in a shanty near the Riverside Drive.

Before leaving the house, the trio disguised themselves.

As they hurried away to the elevated railroad station they all kept a sharp lookout behind them. They were the only persons who boarded the uptown train. When the train started they breathed easier, because they felt confident that no one had followed them.

But what had become of Nick Carter?

We left him hiding behind the packing box in the hall just as the girl uttered that cry of terror. Nick saw Elmora look toward him. As soon as he heard her scream, he was afraid that she had discovered him. Instantly he drew his revolvers and prepared for a struggle.

When the door of the room closed, Nick crept out from his hiding place.

He did not want to be discovered, so he hurried down the stairway and out into the street.

On the pavement he stopped for a short space and thought what he had best do.

Everts and Barker, he concluded, would make a search of the house. They would find nothing, and then they would come down to the street. At the present time he did not care to come into conflict with them. They would be badly frightened as it was, so it would be the safest plan for him to keep out of sight.

The hour was late.

Nick Carter decided that he had learned all he possibly could for that night, so it might be a good plan to drop watching these men until morning.

When he arrived at this decision he walked rapidly away and reached the avenue, into which he turned before Barker came out of the house to make the search.

If the detective had suspected that Elmora and the men

would leave the house he would have remained in the vicinity. But no such suspicion entered his mind.

When Nick had walked several blocks he began to think about what he had overheard, and especially that part of the conversation which related to William Vance, Mr. Van Schaick's butler.

That man was in Bellevue Hospital.

His life was in danger.

If there was any truth in Vint's statement, Vance was receiving the worst of treatment.

There was no telling what the nurses, who were in Bryan's pay, might not do.

"He shall not remain there another hour if I can help it!" Nick exclaimed, as he stopped on the corner of Fourteenth Street near a cab stand. "I'm going to take him away from that hospital to-night."

He called a cab. Getting into it the detective ordered the man to drive him to Bellevue. Half an hour afterward he stood in the hospital office, and asked to see the superintendent.

At first the orderly declined to awaken the official, but when Nick informed him who he was, he took his message up to the superintendent, who came down in about ten minutes.

"I want to take a man away from here," the detective said, as soon as he had exchanged greetings with the official.

"What for?" the superintendent demanded.

"His friends want me to take him to the New York Hospital, where he can receive special care."

"Who is the man?"

"He is the man who was nearly killed in Larry Bryan's joint on Eldridge Street."

"Mr. Carter, do you know the man's name?"

"I do."

"What is it?"

"William Vance. He is Reginald van Schaick's butler."

"He is?"

"Yes."

"What was he doing in Bryan's dive?"

"I know, but I can't tell you."

"Why do you desire his removal?"

"I'll be plain with you, Mr. Brett, and what I tell you I hope you will not repeat."

"You can trust me, Mr. Carter."

"I feel that I can."

"What is it?"

"I know that there is a plot on foot to let this man die; or, if he shows any signs of recovery, to have him sent up to Ward's Island."

"You astonish me."

"Some of the nurses are in it."

"Then I'll give instructions."

"Will you let me take Vance away?"

"I will. And when it is done, I'll help you remove him. I will get out of the ambulance, and we will take him over to the New York Hospital."

The detective went with the superintendent to the ambulance, where they had an ambulance surgeon waiting, and then they went to the ward where Vance was.

They had the latter carried out and placed in the ambulance.

The man was in a pitiable state.

A nurse asked why he was being taken away, but no explanation was given to him.

Nick Carter recognized the nurse.

When he and the superintendent were some distance from the hospital in the ambulance, the detective asked:

"How long has that nurse been in charge of that ward?"

"About a week," the superintendent replied. "Do you know him?"

"I do."

"Do you know anything against him?"

"I do."

"What is it?"

"He has been out of prison about six weeks."

"He was appointed by one of the commissioners."

"I can't help that. He's a crook and one of the men who hang about Larry Bryan's den."

"He goes to-morrow."

They reached the New York Hospital with Vance, and Nick had the butler taken to a private room, where a surgeon examined him.

He pronounced the man in a very precarious condition, but he said that he thought he might be able to restore him to health.

Feeling satisfied that Vance was in good hands, Nick left the hospital, and outside he bade the Bellevue official good-by, after which he went direct to a private house in the neighborhood, where he had a room.

The detective had scored a point.

In removing Vance from the hospital, if the butler recovered, he had saved an important witness. The butler might not be able to prove much. But he would be able to tell of Slavinski's visit to Mr. Van Schaick, and what happened to him when he followed the Jew.

This would connect Slavinski with the case.

Nick Carter had been anxious for a long time to fasten something on Moses.

Now was his opportunity. The detective did not take much rest. By nine o'clock he was up and ready to start out.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE JEW WEAKENS.

Nick took the elevated uptown and alighted at a station near the Askwith mansion and went to a costumer's, where he changed his disguise.

After this he went direct to the house of the missing millionaire and let himself into the house with the latchkey which Mrs. Askwith had given him.

No one was in the hall. The detective heard voices in the library, the door of which was standing partially open. He walked straight to the room and entered without knocking.

"Mine Gott und himmel!"

It was Moses Slavinski who uttered this exclamation.

The old fence was talking with Mrs. Askwith.

Nick Carter could not help smiling when he beheld the Jew's consternation.

Moses jumped to his feet.

Mrs. Askwith was also surprised. She did not recognize the detective, although, after she got a glimpse of him, she surmised it was he.

Nick threw off his disguise.

"Tis vas a drap!" Moses ejaculated, when he recognized the detective. "I dole you, Meeses Askwid, dot I knows nuddings!" Moses cried out, with wild gestures, as he turned his gaze toward the mother of the missing millionaire. "You bromised to teal mit me skwarely. You bromised!"

"You old thief! sit down, or I will choke the life out of you!" Nick exclaimed, as he approached Moses in a threatening manner and shoved him down into the chair from which he had arisen.

Nick stood towering over the Jew, who squirmed like an eel out of water.

"Now, Mrs. Askwith, tell me how this rascal came to call on you?" Nick asked, as he turned toward the widow.

"Half an hour ago my maid announced that there was a man in the library who desired to see me. At first I thought it was you. I came downstairs and I found this man here. He said that he had come to negotiate about the advertisement in the *Herald*——"

"So hellup me gracious! I never tid say nuddings ov te kind. I——" Moses ejaculated.

"Be silent!" Nick Carter thundered.

"Proceed, madam," turning again to Mrs. Askwith.

"He told me that he was acquainted with the men who had sent me the letter, and that he had been authorized by them to negotiate with me for my son's release," Mrs. Askwith continued.

"I never tid. I never tid. Madtam, you knows vell dot I game here to zell t'ese tiamonds," Moses exclaimed, at the same time pulling a diamond necklace out of his pocket and displaying it.

"Silence!" Nick cried out.

"Vot have you to zay here?"

"You'll pretty soon find out."

"I'll not sday here do pe inzulted."

"You'll keep quiet, or I'll put these on you."

Nick Carter displayed a pair of handcuffs.

Moses glanced at them and subsided.

"Continue, please," Nick said to Mrs. Askwith.

"He told me that unless I agreed to pay him one hundred thousand dollars inside of twenty-four hours, my son would be murdered," Mrs. Askwith said.

"Was that all?"

"Just at that point in the conversation you entered."

"So!"

Nick fastened his eyes upon Moses.

The Jew looked up at him with an air of defiance.

"Moses, you are in a tight box," the detective ejaculated.

"A dighd pox?" Moses rejoined.

"That is what I said."

"Goot-tay, Mister Garter."

Moses made a move to get up.

Nick shoved him back.

"Vat vor vas tedain me?"

"Where are Mr. Askwith and Miss Van Schaick," Nick thundered.

"I don' know vot you mean."

"Where is Van Schaick's butler?"

"Vy you ask me does questions?"

"You, with others, tried to kill the man. Ah! you start, do you? Yes, you, Moses, I know more than you think. That assault occurred in Bryan's dive, and, luckily, I discovered that the man was at Bellevue Hospital. I had him removed to the New York Hospital."

"Meester Garter, you vas jokging."

"Come, now, Moses, I guess a cell at police headquarters will about suit you," and with that Nick snapped the iron bracelets over Moses' wrists.

Slavinski saw now that the detective meant business. Instantly he changed his deportment.

"You indend to log me up?" he asked.

"I do," Nick replied.

"On vot charge?"

"Attempted murder and conspiracy."

"Holy Moses! I vos innozent."

"You are guilty, and I have all the evidence against you."

"I——"

"There is no use for you to dissemble any longer, Moses. Hello! Where did you get this necklace?"

Nick jerked the diamond necklace out of the Jew's hands and proceeded to examine it.

As he looked at the clasp, he said:

"Moses, this necklace is Miss Van Schaick's property. It has her name on this clasp. 'Evelyn van Schaick, from her father on her fifteenth birthday.' So you came here to sell this? Moses, you have betrayed yourself."

"I schw——" Moses started to say.

"Don't perjure yourself."

Moses was silent.

At last he looked up and said:

"Ef I dell all I gnow, vot gombenzation to I rezelve?"

"Nothing," the detective rejoined, "except it be a long term in the State's prison. This necklace alone will convict you."

"Mein Gott, I vos untone."

"I should say you were."

"Zubbose I vos do durn Sthate's evitenze?"

"That might help you."

"Vill I get oud?"

"Yes, with a light sentence."

"Nein, nein! Vree?"

"You can't expect that."

"How long vill I ged?"

"One year, probably."

Moses scratched his head. He considered the matter for a time. Then he looked at Mrs. Askwith and said:

"Madtam, vill you not bay me some monish iv I durn Sthate's evitenze?"

"Not one dime," Nick answered, before Mrs. Askwith could reply.

"Dink ov your zon, Zohn," the Jew went on, without heeding the detective.

"You are dealing with me, and not with Mrs. Askwith," Nick remarked.

"Madtam——"

"Moses, come on."

"Vot?"

"I am going to take you to headquarters. Then you will have the inspector to deal with."

Nick caught hold of Moses' arm and pulled him toward the door.

"Vait!" Moses cried out.

"Well?"

"I vill talk."
"Good!"
"Vill you bay me sumdings, madtam?"
"Moses, you must come to headquarters."
"Holt on, Mr. Carter."
"You will tell all you know?"
"I vill."
"Proceed."
"Vell, I dole you all dot I know."
"Go on."
"It vas dree veeks ago las' Vonstay dot te Paron von Premer he gomes do me und zells te prazier. He zaid it vas giv' do him py Miss Van Skaiek's father, who vas in vinanzal divickulties und vanted nonish. I bought it of him, und he vas goin' away, ven he met Windt at t'e door. Windt he regognise him und gall him Zenega Parker. Dot vas all I zee ov dem ven dey vent avay; den Everts he gome do me a few days ago, und he tells me do go do Meester Van Skaig und dry do negogiate t'e release ov his daughter. I goss und I get no zadisvacion; den Everts gome do me las' nite, und he dells me do gome here und zee Madtam Asgwid again her zon. Dot vas all I gnow, so hellup me grazious!"
"Is that all you know?"
"Dot vas all, I schware."
"Where are Mr. Ashwith and Miss Van Schaick?"
"You vant do gnow?"
"Certainly."
"Vill you agwit me?"
"No."
"You gome mit me und I vill show you de Mace."
Moses was more tractable.
Nick led him from the house and took him to police headquarters.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FINAL STRUGGLE.

At police headquarters Nick Carter explained the situation to the inspector in charge of the detective bureau.

It is needless to say that the chief inspector was astonished. He rang for his messenger, and when the officer entered he ordered him to send six men to him immediately.

When the men entered the office, he put on his hat and coat, and was ready to start with the men with Nick.

Moses by this time realized that there was no chance of playing any games, and he was ready and willing to obey every order. No parley would be shown him if he tried to lead the detectives astray.

The officers took a Harlem train.

At the One Hundred and Fourth-fifth Street Station the detectives alighted. Moses led the way.

It was now dark, and the night was cloudy. Moses conducted the detectives to a frame house on a side street near the Riverside Drive. They approached the place cautiously.

The inspector detailed three of the men to watch the sides and rear of the house, with instructions to shoot down any one who might attempt to escape.

Then he, Nick Carter, with the Jew in front, and the other men following, ascended the front stoop.

Moses was ordered to ring the doorbell, which he did, giving the signal, which was familiar to the gang.

The door was opened.

Elmora stood upon the threshold.

Nick Carter caught hold of her, and clapped his hand over her mouth, so that she was not able to cry out and give an alarm.

The detective dragged the girl from the house. She struggled hard, but it was no use. Nick tied a handkerchief over her mouth, clasped a pair of handcuffs about her wrists, and turned her over to one of the men. Then he led the way into the house.

The inspector stationed a man at the door with Moses.

Nick heard voices in a back room.

He drew his pistol, and walking up to the door of the room, he threw it open and entered.

"Surrender!" the detective cried out, and at the same time he leveled his pistols at the men who were seated at a table.

Barker, Everts, Vint and Darrell, who were the only persons in the room, jumped to their feet.

Barker uttered an oath and made a spring for Nick. Bang! The detective fired.

Barker fell. He was shot in the left shoulder.

Vint, Everts and Darrell made a dart for the door. Here the inspector confronted them. He covered them with his revolvers and they fell back.

As soon as Nick Carter shot Barker and that rascal fell to the floor, the detective wheeled around, and dealt Vint a stinging blow behind the ear.

Vint toppled over onto the floor.

Darrell was dealt with in the same way.

The inspector closed in on Everts, overpowered him and put the handcuffs around his wrists. Nick put the irons on Vint and Darrell and then he turned to look at Barker. The rascal had disappeared.

While Nick was engaged with Vint and Darrell, and the inspector was busy with Everts, Barker had arisen to his feet and escaped from the room.

Nick ran out into the hall and caught sight of Barker making up the stairs.

It occurred to him that the rascal intended to commit some mischief.

Barker looked back. He saw the detective and he uttered a sardonic laugh.

Nick started up the stairs.

Barker reached the top and looked down. Pointing a pistol at the detective, he fired. The ball cut off a piece of Nick's hat, but this did not deter the intrepid detective. He dashed up the stairway two steps at a time.

When he was halfway up Barker fired again. Then he turned and ran into a room.

Nick was not injured.

He reached the top of the stairway. He had noted the room into which the villain had fled. The detective tried to open the door, but it was locked.

Just then a pistol shot was fired in the room. A terrible scream followed. It had been uttered by a woman. Nick's heart stood still. Barker had shot a woman. Who was that woman? Was it Evelyn van Schaick? Had the rascal shot her?

Nick threw himself against the door with all of his force.

"What has happened?" the inspector, who had just rushed up, exclaimed.

"I can't tell. That villain has shot a woman," Nick panted.

"Let me help you."

Both pressed their shoulders against the door. It cracked.

"Now!" the inspector ejaculated. "Another push. There!"

The door gave way. It flew open. Nick pulled out his dark lantern. He flashed the light into the room. The inspector uttered an exclamation. He rushed toward the window. Barker was climbing out. The inspector grabbed him just as he was about to jump out of the window and dragged him back into the room.

A desperate struggle followed.

Barker tried to pull his pistol on the inspector.

Finding that he could not shoot the veteran, the rascal placed the pistol to his own temple. Before the inspector could catch hold of his wrist he pulled the trigger. The ball went crashing into his brain.

With a groan Seneca Barker, the man with many aliases, fell to the floor—dead.

He gave one gasp and all was over.

At this moment a detective entered the room.

In his charge the inspector placed the body, with instructions to have it removed, and after the inquest to see that it was buried.

"We must search the house," Nick Carter exclaimed.

He and the inspector entered the next room.

There they found both John Jacob Askwith and Evelyn van Schaick bound and gagged.

Nick released them.

As soon as the young millionaire was able to speak, and Nick explained to him what had happened, he said:

"The morning I left home I met the baron—at least, I thought he was a baron—on the avenue. He said that he was going downtown, and he invited me to ride in his cab. I accepted the invitation. We had hardly started when he threw his arm around my neck, clasped a chloroformed handkerchief over my mouth and nostrils, and I soon succumbed to the drug. The next thing I remembered I found myself in this room, bound and gagged. Then he and a gang came to me and endeavored to induce me to sign several checks, aggregating in all a million dollars. I refused to do it. Then they brought me the note which they said they were going to take to my mother, and I wrote at the bottom a message, which you say you read. That afternoon they brought Evelyn in here. She can tell her story."

Nick Carter looked toward Evelyn, and she said:

"I was dressing when I received a note, which I thought was from Mr. Askwith. I went down to a cab which was standing at the door of my house. As I looked into it I was grabbed by two ruffians, who hauled me inside, closed the door, gagged me and called out to the man on the box to drive off. They brought me to this den. Baron von Bremer came in and tried to prevail upon me to marry him. I refused because—I——"

"You loved me," Askwith put in.

"Yes."

"How long have you known the baron?" Nick asked.

"Some time. Papa and I met him abroad. When he came to New York we entertained him. He asked me to marry him several times, and I refused. He was terribly jealous of John. He left our home suddenly after a quarrel with papa. Papa seemed to be afraid of him for some inexplicable reason. He told me that he had formed this plot and abducted me so that he could force me to become his wife. And he abducted John, he said, to extort money out of him or his mother. This is all that I know."

Elmora afterward made a confession, and she told substantially the same story about the plot, implicating Vint and Darrell as the men who had abducted Evelyn.

The prisoners were removed to police headquarters.

Nick and Askwith conducted Evelyn to her home.

There they found the household in confusion. Mr. Van Schaick had been stricken down with apoplexy. A few minutes after Evelyn's arrival the old merchant breathed his last.

He never spoke. Whatever the hold was that Barker had on him, Nick Carter was never able to find out. Mr. Van Schaick carried the secret with him to the grave.

Vint, Darrel and Everts were sentenced to long terms in State's prison.

Elmora left the city and became the queen of a band of thugs in a Western city.

Vance, the butler, recovered and furnished important evidence at the trials of the men. He is now living with Evelyn.

Moses Slavinski, the fence, died in the Tombs prison before he was tried, and the property went to his daughter, Rebecca, who married a pawnbroker, who succeeded to her father's business.

Mrs. Askwith was overjoyed at her son's return, and she and John insisted upon Nick Carter taking the reward which had been offered.

One year after these events took place, Evelyn and Askwith were married, and Nick was present at the wedding.

Although Nick Carter has solved many mysterious cases, he considers that none of them are equal in sensational episodes to this one.

THE END.

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